

**LANGUAGES IN THE SOCIAL WORLD OF
INDIGENOUS SIBERIA:**

EVIDENCE FROM LOWER YENISEI

OLESYA KHANINA

INSTITUTE OF LINGUISTICS RAS & FINNO-UGRIAN SOCIETY & UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

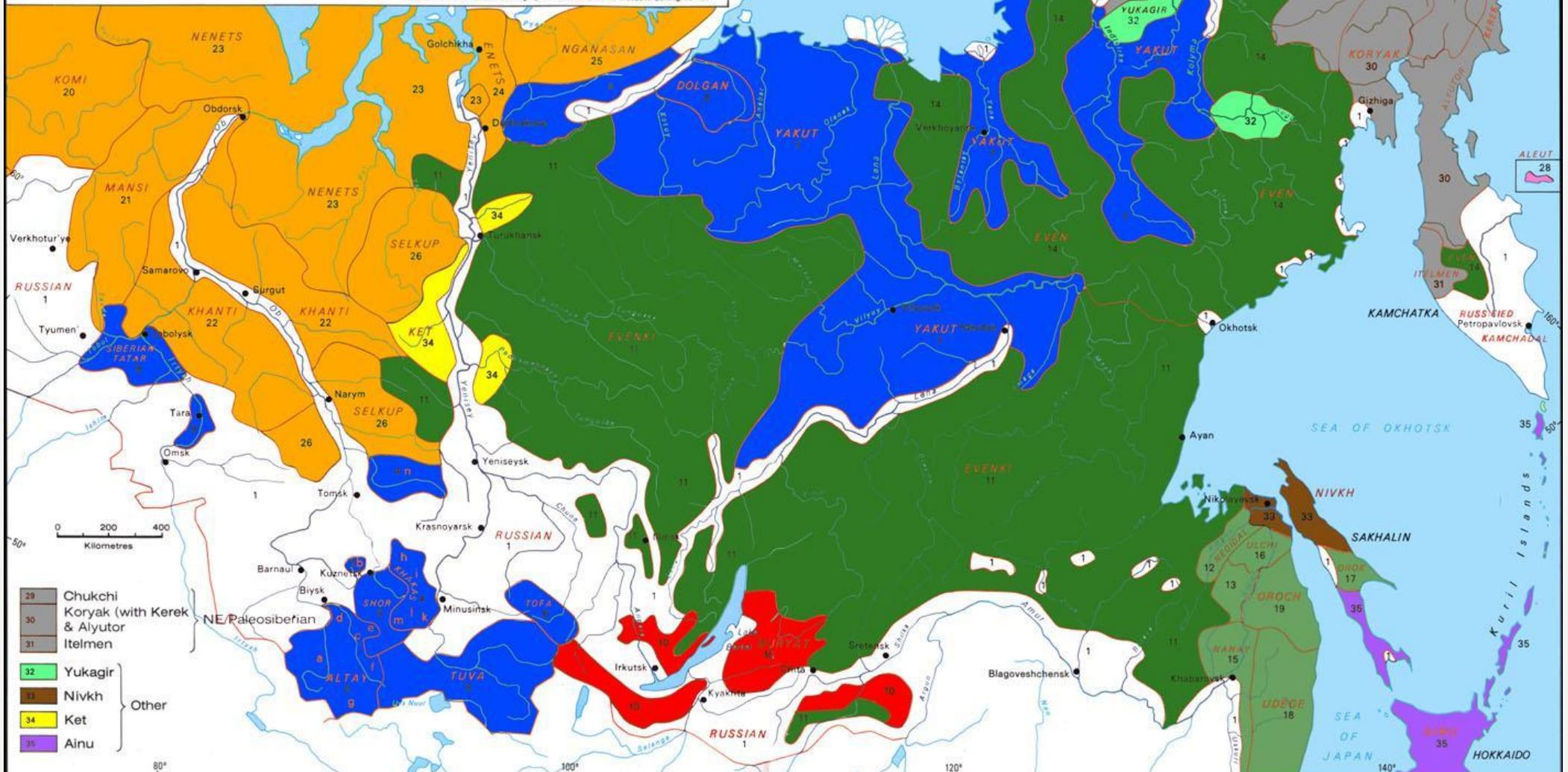
INTRODUCTION 1

- multilingual Lower Yenisei area in Siberia
- a comprehensive study of the sociolinguistic landscape
- illuminating parallels between indigenous communities in the Northern Siberia and
 - Australia (Merlan 1981, Singer 2018),
 - West Papua (de Vries 2012),
 - Vanuatu (Francois 2012),
 - Amazon (Aikhenvald 2003, Ball 2011),
 - Arizona (Kroskrity 2018),
 - Africa (Childs et al. 2014).

Distribution of ethnic groups and languages in Siberia at the beginning of the 20th Century

1	Russian and Russified Kamchadal	a	Altay	m	Khakas	16	Ulchi	Tungus-Manchu	
b	Altay Kizhi	n	Teleut	17	Beltir	17	Orok		
c	Tuba		Kumandin	18	Chulym	18	Udege	Tungus-Manchu	
d	Cheikan		Teles	19	Tuva	19	Oroch		
e	Telenget	Turkic	Shor	20	Yakut	20	Komi → Finnic	Fenno-Ugric	
f	Khakas		21	Mansi	21	Dolgan	21		Mansi
g	Kyzyl		22	Siberian Tatar	22	Siberian Tatar	22		Khanty
h	Kachin		Mongol	23	Nenets	23	Nenets	Samoyedic	
i	Koibal			24	Enets	24	Enets		
k	Sagay	25	Nganasan	25	Nganasan				
l		Tungus-Manchu	26	Selkup	26	Selkup	Eskimo-Aleut		
			27	Buryat	27	Buryat			
			28	Eskimo	28	Aleut			
			29	Evenki	29	Evenki			
			30	Negidal	30	Negidal			
			31	Samagir	31	Samagir			
			32	Even	32	Even			
			33	Nanay	33	Nanay			
			34		34				
			35		35				

Based on the Historical Ethnographic Atlas of Siberia, Moscow-Leningrad 1961



29	Chukchi
30	Koryak (with Kerek & Alyutor)
31	Itelmen
32	Yukagir
33	Nivkh
34	Ket
35	Ainu

Other

INTRODUCTION 2

Recurrent patterns are attested in these indigenous multilingual communities:

- **absence of hierarchical and one-to-one relationships** between social units, types of materials culture, and languages,
- **shared cultural knowledge** and principles of interactions irrespective of particular codes,
- **relational identities** and ideologies **deemphasizing linguistic** contributions to these identities.

-> **basic mechanisms of (a version of) the precolonial sociolinguistic past?**

OUTLINE

1. Introduction
2. Lower Yenisei case
3. The typology

Language ideologies as a theoretical framework for the present study (e.g. Kroskrity, 2000; Rumsey, 1990; Silverstein, 1979; Woolard, 1998).

Khanina, Olesya. 2021. Languages and ideologies at Lower Yenisei (Siberia): reconstructing past multilingualism, *International Journal of Bilingualism* (Typology of Small-Scale Multilingualism, edited by Nina Dobrushina, Olesya Khanina, and Brigitte Pakendorf).

LOWER YENISEI: METHODOLOGY

- A **retrospective** study: 1900-1930s, just before the sovietization of this part of Russia marked by
 - externally driven changes in subsistence modes: collective farms, nationalizations of reindeer, etc.,
 - imprisonment of shamans and rich(=efficient) reindeer herders,
 - fleeing of indigenous locals to less accessible areas (=away from the Yenisei river),
 - obligatory school education in Russian, in boarding schools,
 - Russian as lingua franca,
 - a rapid language shift to Russian: not a single children speaking an indigenous language today
- How to access a sociolinguistic setting in the past?
 - Dobrushina (2013): retrospective interviews
 - Dobrushina & Moroz (2021), Pupynina & Aralova (2021): census data

LOWER YENISEI: DATA

- a)** the 1926 census data,
- b)** ethnographic field reports from 1920s-1960s,
- c)** narratives collected in the 1940s (also Khanina & Meyerhoff 2018),
- d)** 35 retrospective sociolinguistic interviews from 2017 (also Khanina 2019),
- e)** ethnonyms of local languages (based on corpora of respective languages).

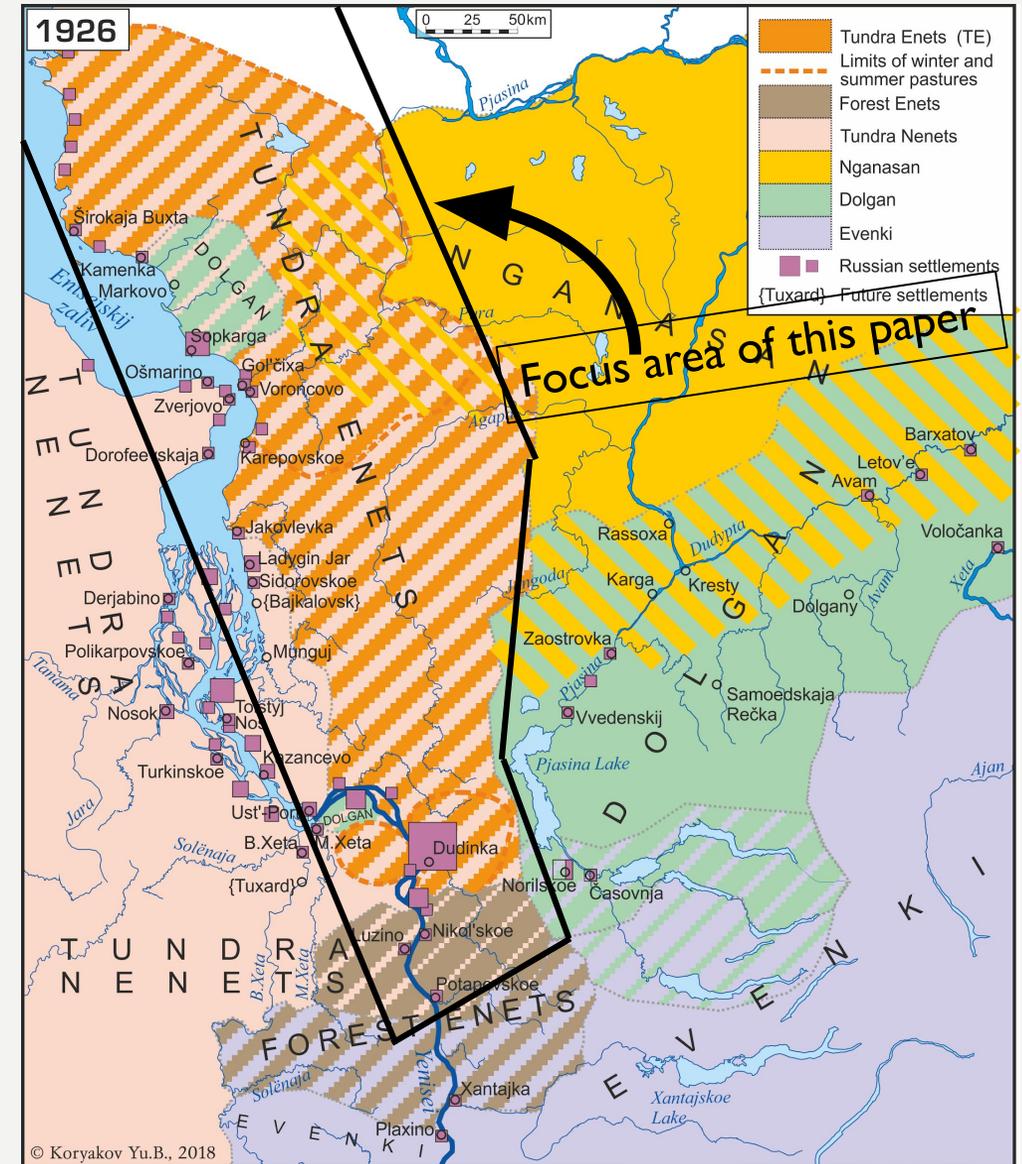
(With a background of my language documentation fieldtrips 2005-2017.)

(a)-(b) provide a background for the interpretation of (socio)linguistic data (c)-(e).

An ethnographic approach is taken, which interprets sociolinguistic data in view of emic categorizations.

LOWER YENISEI: AREA & LANGUAGES

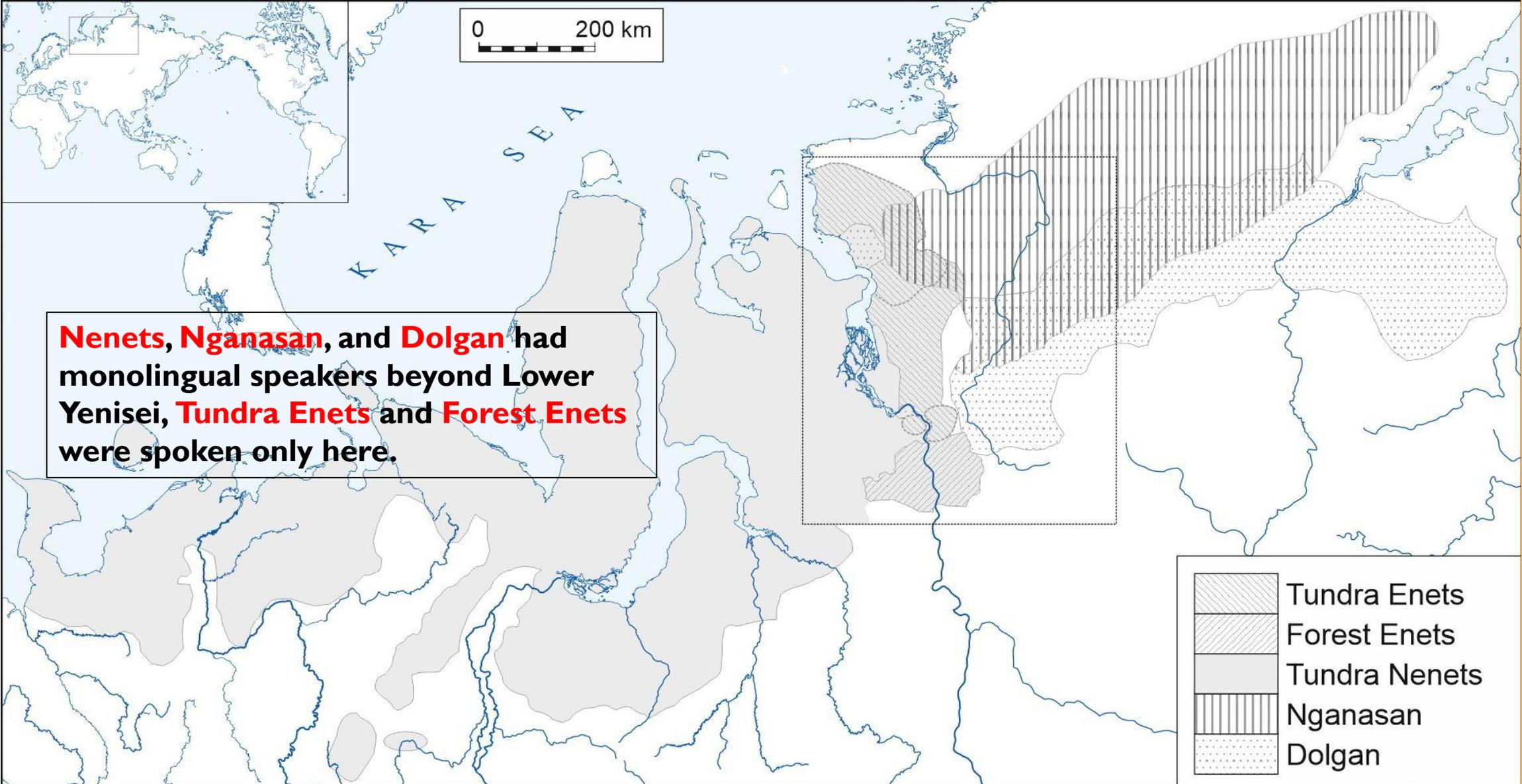
- **Nenets, Forest Enets, Tundra Enets, Nganasan:**
Northern Samoyedic (< Uralic)
 - **Forest Enets** is very similar to **Tundra Enets**
- **Dolgan:** Turkic
- Very low population density: ca. 200 * 500 km
 - ~ 2 000 (semi-)nomadic indigenous people,
 - ~ 35 000 reindeer,
 - ~ 500 Russian colonizers in villages along Yenisei.
- An extended family in 1-2 tents; several tents could often be seen together: family and/or labor ties.
- The different families tended to remain together over longer periods, but nothing similar to a 'village' was typical for the area.





LOWER YENISEI: AREA & LANGUAGES

- All indigenous people practiced the same type of activities, so no barter exchange or trade.
 - However, domestic reindeer of bigger herds were exchanged from time to time to ensure the better health of reindeer population: not with families in direct neighborhood, but with the more distant ones.
- Every spring (March-April): an important custom of paying and hosting visits
 - in-married spouses would visit their parents and the rest of the family,
 - moments of the most social interaction.
- People rarely met complete strangers: anyone met could be connected to someone already known.
- The physical distance between individual families was only a weak correlate of the social distance between them, and networks were supported rather by marriages and regular visits than by direct geographic proximity.
- Communities of this Arctic area were much looser than elsewhere.



Nenets, Nganasan, and Dolgan had monolingual speakers beyond Lower Yenisei, **Tundra Enets** and **Forest Enets** were spoken only here.

- Tundra Enets
- Forest Enets
- Tundra Nenets
- Nganasan
- Dolgan

LOCAL SOCIAL CATEGORIZATIONS

- Russian colonizers were set apart by their sedentary lifestyle, their residence exclusively in villages, their subsistence patterns (trade in addition to hunting and fishing), and their language.
- All the other local people could be categorized by their **clans** and **patterns of material culture**
- There were also categories of a higher order: so-called **ethnic groups**, but they were not as unambiguous and mutually exclusive as the first two.
 - To understand their logic, I study ethnonyms of local languages.
- Mapping these social categories to languages is not trivial: no one-to-one correspondence.

CLANS

- patrilineal and unambiguous, the most basic social grouping
- ~40 clans in the area
- clan-based exogamous marriages
- Each clan counted from a handful to several dozens of members at any given time.
- Clans could disappear with time, due to illnesses and exogamous marriages.
- Multidirectional **language shifts** by clans or their fractions over the past centuries:
 - clans switched from one language to another,
 - family (=blood) connections between clans currently speaking different languages.

PATTERNS OF MATERIAL CULTURE

- Clothes, dwellings, sledges, etc.
- Drastic difference: Dolgan vs. Northern Samoyedic
- Smaller differences: Nganasan & Tundra Enets vs. Nenets & Forest Enets



'ETHNIC' GROUPS

- Exonyms and endonyms of 6 local lects, including the local Russian of the 1930s, point to the existence of 6 named groups in most of them.

BUT

- some local languages merge some of these six groups in their lexicons,
 - Tundra Enets & Nganasan, Forest Enets & Nenets, Forest Enets & Tundra Enets, Tundra Enets & Nganasan & Forest Enets, Tundra Enets & Nganasan & Forest Enets & Nenets
- some languages lack original endonyms
 - Tundra Enets: borrowed from Nganasan (earlier) and Nenets (later)
 - Forest Enets, Dolgan: no endonyms, self reference by clan names only, endonyms were invented by Soviet ethnographers and linguists in the 1930s
- some words have changed their meaning in the course of just several decades.

Name of a representative of the group	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Merges are shown in bold		
					(5)	(6)	
in Nenets	jurak°	(pia) waj	manto	tawis	tungos	lusa	
in Nganasan	d'üriakə	bai	səmaʔtu	ńaa	aśa	l'üəʔsa	
in Tundra Enets	diurako	(pe) baj	somatu, mandu 1930: ɔnej enetʃeʔ	tau, 1930: ɔnej enetʃeʔ	ɔʃa	losa	
	ɔnej enetʃeʔ						
in Forest Enets	diurako	ɔnej entʃeʔ 1930: pebaj	madu (also tau)	tau (also madu)	ɔʃa	losa, rosa	
	ɔnej entʃeʔ						
in Dolgan	d'urak, n'en'ec	?	ha:maj		dalga:n, dulga:n, haka	n'u:čča, nu:čča	
		en'ec		nganasan, nganasan'in			
in local Russian of the 1930s	jurak		xantajskij samod'in, xantajskij, somatu	avamskij samod'in, tau, avamskij tau, avamskij	dolgan	russk'ij, krest'janin	
	jurak	karasinskij samod'in, karasinskij (also baj, muggad'i, chor...)	samod'in				
in modern local Russian	n'en'ec, tuxardskij	potapovskij, potapovskij enec	voroncovskij, voroncovskij en'ec, somatu	nganasan(in), avamskij	dolgan('in)	russk'ij	
		en'ec					
in academic English	a Nenets	a Forest Enets	a Tundra Enets	a Nganasan	a Dolgan	a local Russian of the 1930s	

'ETHNIC' GROUPS AND LANGUAGES

- language shifts between clans did not necessarily lead to shifts in emic social categorizations ('outsiders that acquired our language'), i.e. a shared language did not automatically mean a shared social identity
- mismatches 'named ethnic groups' <-> 'languages' attested in the 1926 census
 - 77% of those who named themselves Tundra Enets said their language was TE, the others chose Nenets
 - 53% of those who named themselves Forest Enets said their language was FE, the others chose TE
 - 84% of those who named themselves Nenets said their language was Nenets, the others chose FE or TE
 - 50% of those who said they spoke TE, declared themselves as belonging to a different 'ethnic' group: FE, Nenets
- holders of traditional knowledge in a particular language could function as such regardless their membership in a different 'ethnic' group
 - academic fieldtrips to the area: locals send researchers to Nganasans for traditional TE stories in TE or to TEs for traditional Nganasan stories in Nganasan

SOCIAL CATEGORIES AND LANGUAGES

Summing up, at Lower Yenisei we see

- no uniformity in categorization by 'ethnic groups',
- no direct correlations between languages and social categories (neither clans, nor 'ethnic' groups)
- numerous diachronic changes in social categories and languages spoken by their members.

Anderson (2000), an ethnographer's view: the complexity and flexibility of ethnic categories at the Lower Yenisei river is not a chaotic mess, but a reflection of a profoundly distinct social world.

⇒ Multilingualism was a logical counterpart of this social order on the linguistic side.

ASPECTS OF MULTILINGUALISM 1

Language use within families and child language acquisition

- Ca. 50% of all marriages in the area were mixed, i.e. multiethnic (the 1926 census).
- In multiethnic families, one language was usually chosen for communication with children, usually the one that was heard the most often in the whereabouts of the family
 - occasionally, the language of the husband could be chosen even if in the minority
 - the linguistic majority of the focus area was Enets, with TE in the north and FE in the south, and so this contributed to the maintenance of TE and TE despite numerous speakers of other languages around.
- It was rare for each parent to practice speaking different languages to the children.
- When communicating between themselves, parents used the same language as chosen for communication with children, or they spoke each their own language (=receptive bilingualism).
 - This often vanished with time as the spouse with the minority language acquired the other language.
- Children usually acquired their second and third languages when playing with their peers and while listening to the adults conversing with visitors to their tents.

ASPECTS OF MULTILINGUALISM 2

Language use beyond the family

- Everyone could at least understand all languages regularly used around them, and often also speak them.
 - Remember the relatedness of most local languages!
- Adults whose native language was not practiced in the family used every opportunity to speak it, either with adults from the same 'ethnic' group or with those having a good command of it.
 - Remember the spring visits!
- It was also common to use the language of one's interlocutor: a kind of politeness often conditioned by practical needs (if one needs something from his/her interlocutor).
- Little emblematic value: no language was seen as better than the others, and one's repertoires did not influence one's social weight.
- It was the multilingualism per se that was appreciated in contrast to any single local language.
 - The most respected adults were usually multilingual, just because rich life experience inevitably presupposed confronting many people and thus acquiring many languages.

THE CROSS-LINGUISTIC PARALLELS

- At LY, communities (at least those with many speakers of Tundra Enets or Forest Enets) were defined not so much by the command of a language, but by the confluence of commands of several languages.
 - Ball (2011) for Upper Xingu in Amazonia,
 - Morozova & Rusakov (2021) for a Balkan area,
 - Childs et al. (2014) for Sub-Saharan Africa,
 - Kroskrity (2018) for California

provide further cross-linguistic parallels to speech communities where linguistic repertoires are more reliable "loci of authenticity" than single languages (wording from Kroskrity, 2018: 134).

Speech communities

THE CROSS-LINGUISTIC PARALLELS

- At LY, linguistic identities did not play a decisive role in social identities, or local social identities were of relational nature, with several diverse components making up a complex social self
 - Singer (2018: 107-108) for Australia: “languages are not necessarily the most important aspects of people's identities at Waruwi”.
 - De Vries (2012: 15) for West Papua: “languages transcend the boundaries of the clan, and speakers of the same language live on a different clan territory and may be your enemies”, non-hierarchical complexity of relational identities - linguistic, cultural, and political.
- At LY, linguistic indexing of identity relied more on local social networks than on ancestry: choosing the language to use with their children, parents valued neighborhood above kinship.
 - (François, 2012: 91) for Vanuatu: in marriages across islands the dominant language of the household is usually the language of the village where the couple has chosen to live.
 - NB: a common reason for language shifts worldwide, but at LY all languages were shifted from and shifted to, so languages were equal in this respect.

Identities

CONCLUSION

- If multilingualism was one of the primal human conditions (Evans 2017), some of the features of small-scale multilingual societies could be much more common in the past.
- Among them,
 - no one-to-one correspondence between languages and social categories/units,
 - speech communities as opposed to language communities,
 - relational identities where language is just a component of a complex social self.

P.S.

My way through this study:

- data collected in the field
 - with very limited sociolinguistic background, I am a descriptive linguist and a typologist by training!
- first generalizations: "languages are not important in the local social world" - how could this be??
- review of the literature devoted to ideologies shared by small-scale multilingual societies (as a part of Pakendorf, Dobrushina & Khanina 2021)
- noticing the same ideological patterns in my data.

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