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# The Lower Kolyma multilingual area

## Analysis of language proficiency levels

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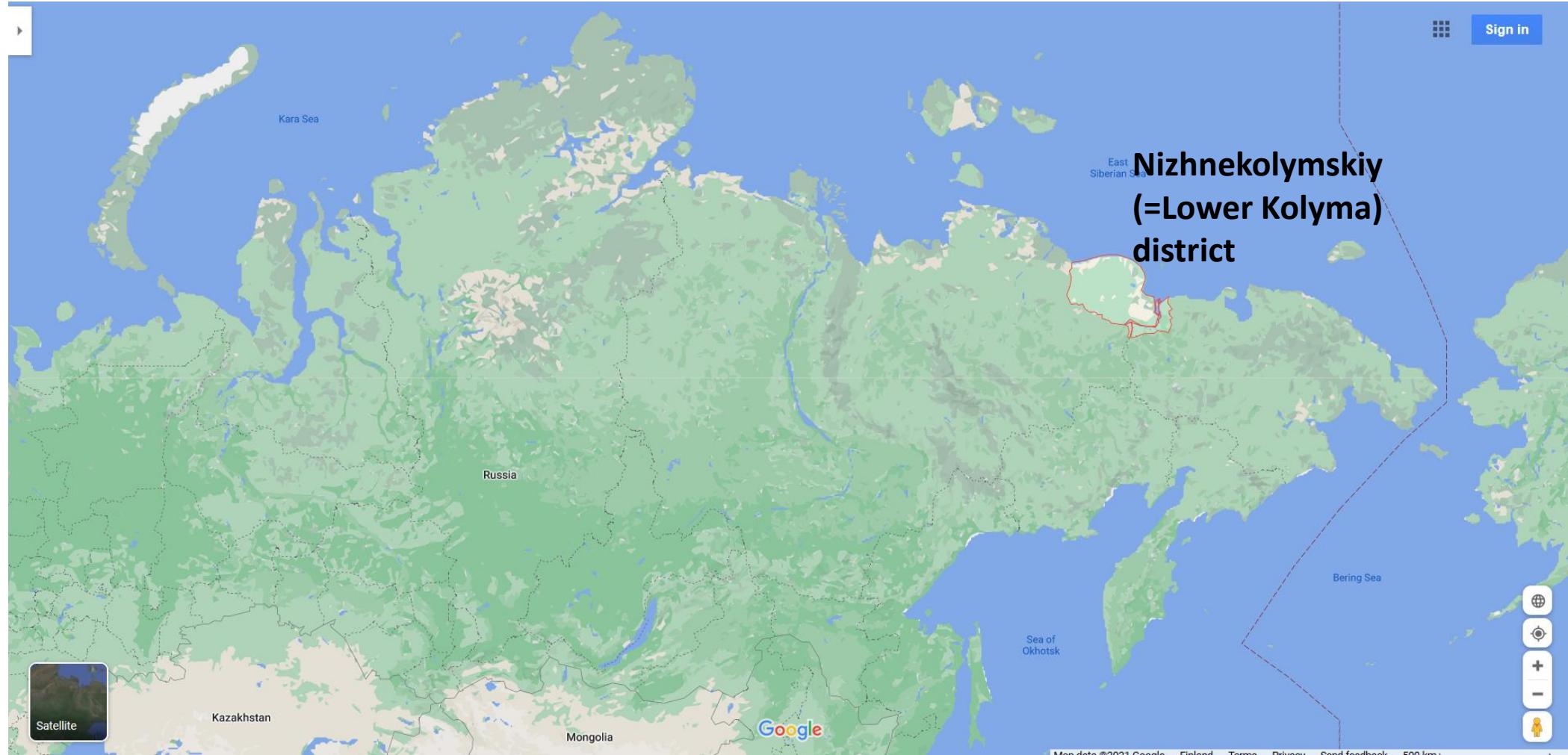
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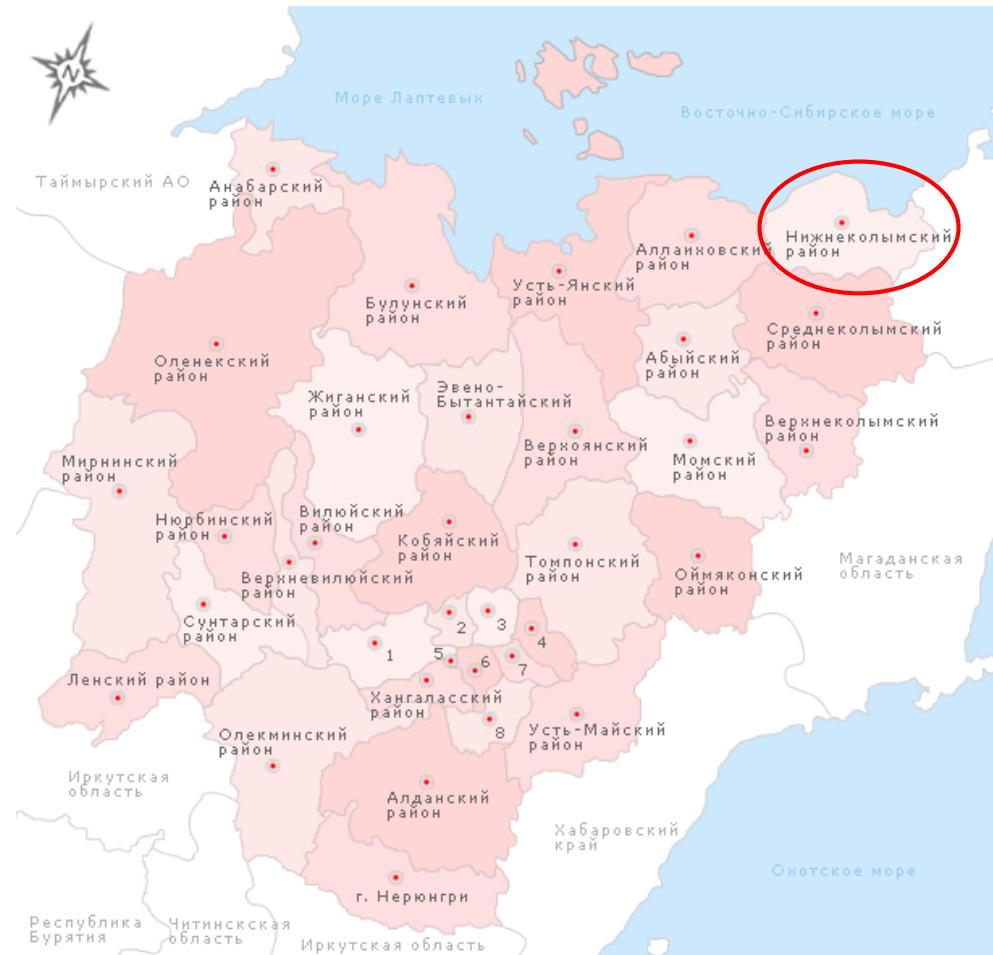
RSF project 17-18-01649 “Dynamics of language contact in the Circumpolar region”



# Description of the area: Lower Kolyma (LK) district in the map of Northern Asia



# Description of the area: LK district in the administrative map of Yakutia republic, Russia



**Nizhnekolymskiy  
(=Lower Kolyma)  
district**

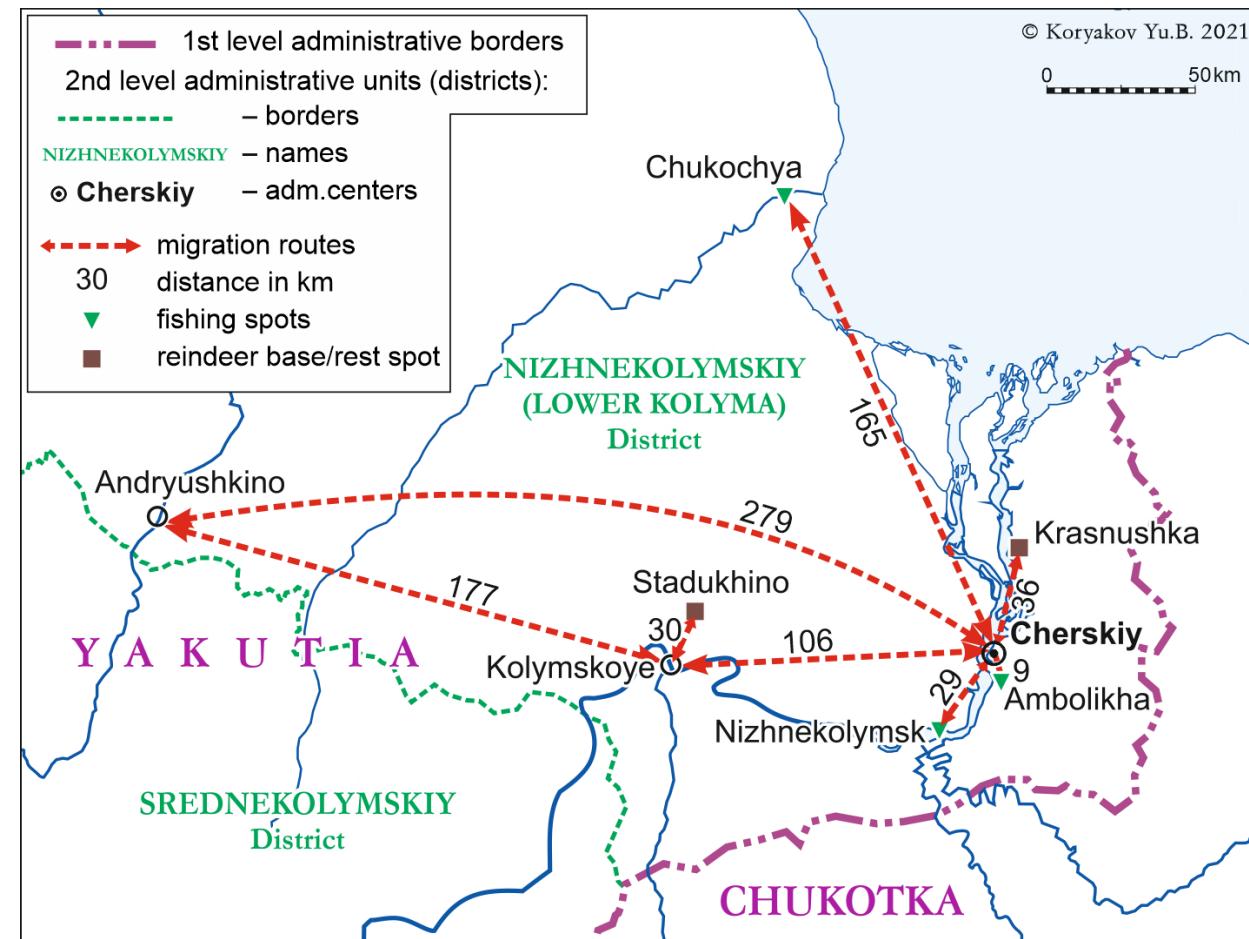
[https://dnevnik.ykt.ru/urbanist\\_severa/1150245](https://dnevnik.ykt.ru/urbanist_severa/1150245)

# Description of the area: villages of LK district



# Migration patterns of the locals in LK district

- A vast area, very far from the republic capital Yakutsk
- No public transport between the villages except helicopter once a month
- Very low income and very high prices
- Main means of transport are personal boats in the summer and off-road cars in the winter
- A branchy and versatile system of social networks, exchange system: if one has a vehicle, he or she regularly helps a number of people



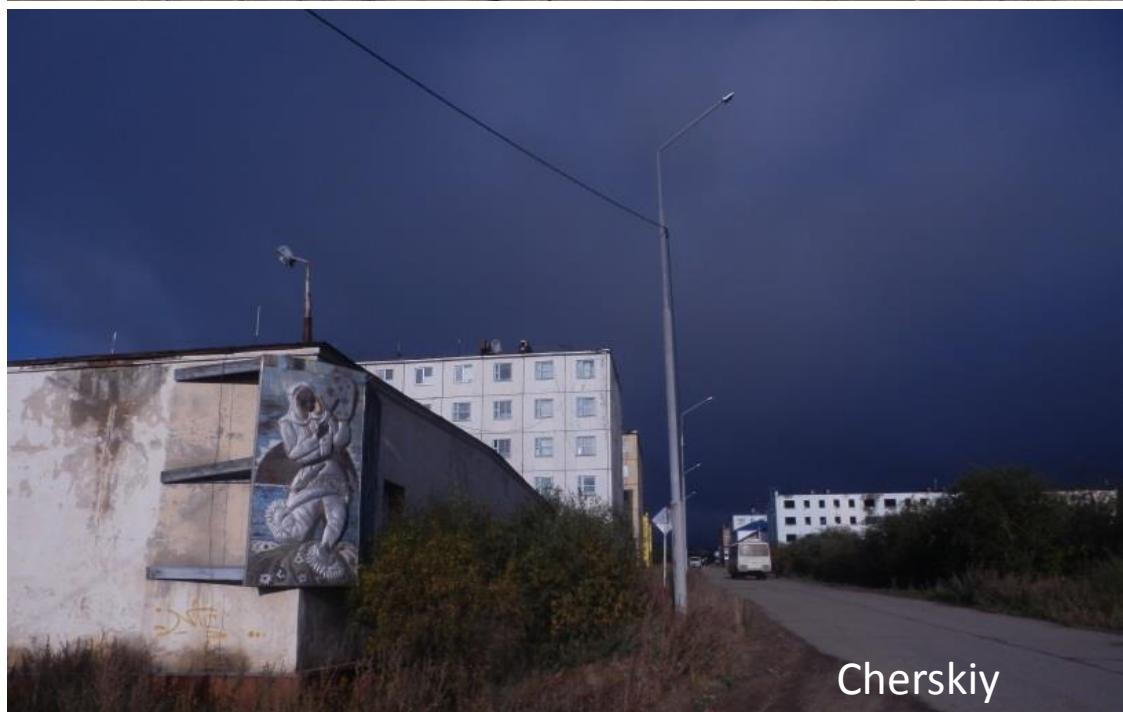
Several of many migration roots. Fieldwork 2013-2018 was conducted in all these points except Adryushkino.



Kolymskoye



Nomadic camp in tundra (not far from Kolymskoye)



Cherskiy



Nomadic camp in tundra(not far from Chukochya)

# Languages of the area

Five languages (and ethnic groups)

- Tundra Yukaghirs (Yukaghirs language family)
- Even (Tungusic)
- Chukchi (Chukotko-Kamchatkan)
- Yakut (Turkic)
- Russian (Indo-European)



Two Chukchi speakers in Kolymskoye

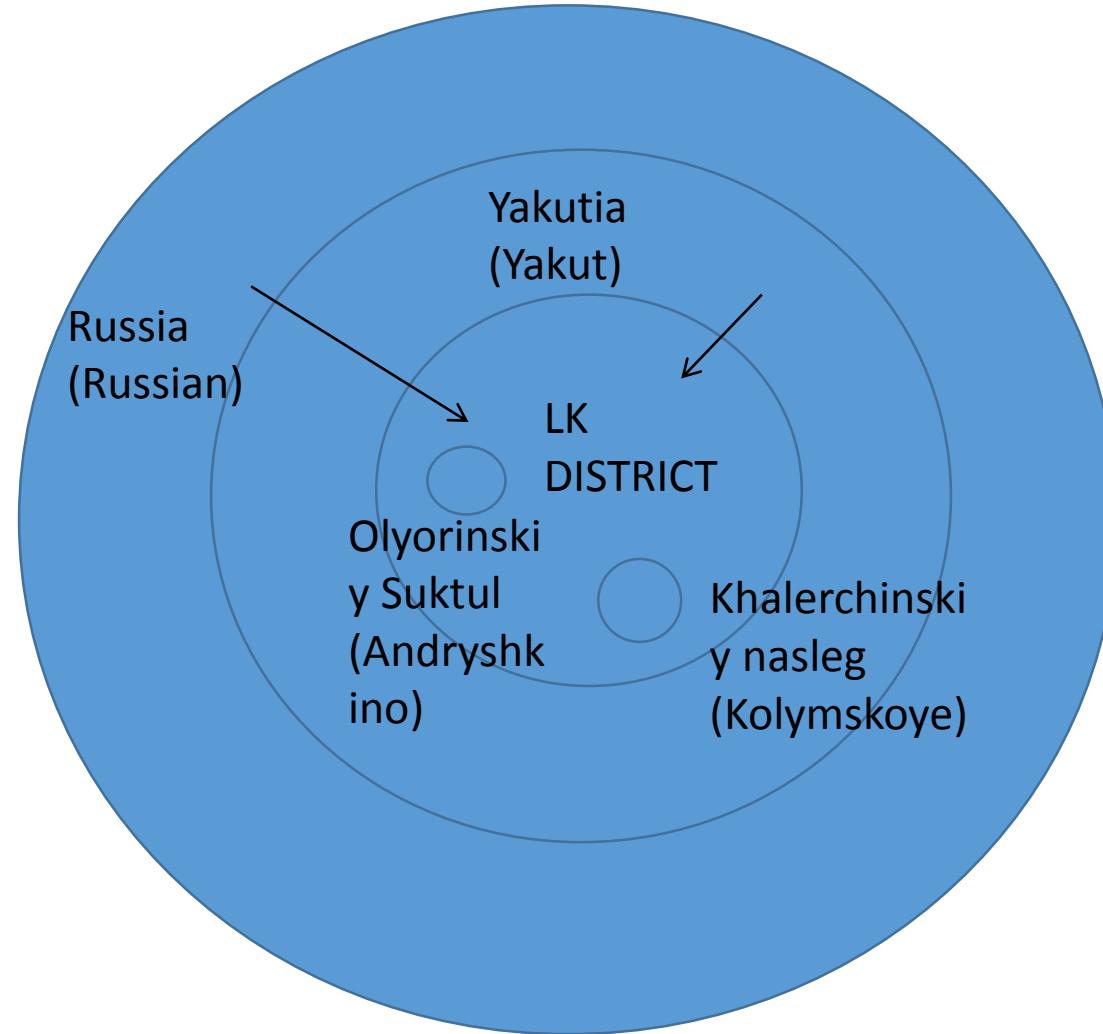


Participants of the reindeer races in Kolymskoye

# Languages of the area

Place of LK district  
in administrative  
system:

pressure on local  
languages of an  
ideological nature



# Multilingualism in the LK region

- Linguistic repertoires consisting of five languages were very common in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Gurvich 1952, 1959, Vakhtin 2001)
- Russian had a significantly lower importance before 1940, but its importance steadily grew throughout the second half century
- The role of Yakut was higher than that of the Russian in pre-Soviet and early Soviet times.

# The area and its languages today

- Decline of multilingualism.
- As a rule, people use various local languages only occasionally.
- We observe only traces of the daily multilingualism which (as data show) was typical all over the region in 20<sup>th</sup> century in villages, fishing places and reindeer-breeding brigades.
- Quadri- and pentalingual people still exist, but they tend to use Russian much more often than other languages.

→ The observation methods can be used in a limited way in LK region.

But pentalingualism and quadrilingualism can still be observed *in vivo* (very rarely)

# The area and its languages today

- Nikolay Yaglovskiy, born in 1947, Yukaghir, is one of the few pentalinguals of LK district
  - Speaks three languages when talking his wife: Russian, Yakut and Chukchi (She is Yakut and can speak Yakut, Russian and has basic command in Chukchi)
  - Speaks Chukchi to all his Chukchi-speaking friends
  - Speaks Yukaghir to those for whom Yukaghir is the first language
  - Speaks Yukaghir to his Yakut friend who lived and worked in sovkhoz
  - Can understand Even when his Even friends speak to each other



# Reconstruction of multilingualism

In order to study this nearly extinct multilingual situation we use the following sources:

- memories of our consultants;
- historical sources: ethnographic data of the past, notes of visitors to the region (Patkanov 1912, Jochelson 1926, Gurvich 1952, 1959 etc.);
- language comparison data.

Thus, we speak about RECONSTRUCTION of LK multilingualism, its development and historical and sociocultural ground for it, rather than description of the current state of affairs.

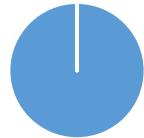
# Reconstruction of multilingualism:

- Methodology
  - Retrospective interviews and questionnaires handed in to the 84 respondents indigenous in this area (2018).
  - Questions: year and place of birth of the respondent, place of school, ethnic self-identity, languages acquired, settings for different languages, levels of proficiency in each language;
    - + additional blocks of questions about respondent's parents and/or respondent's caregivers include year of birth, ethnicity, languages and the level of proficiency. = in total 240 subjects born between 1878 and 1996

# Taking *level* into account

- Our scale for different levels of proficiency:

full proficiency



speaks well



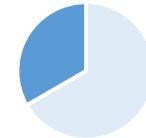
speaks with errors



uses simple phrases,  
full understanding



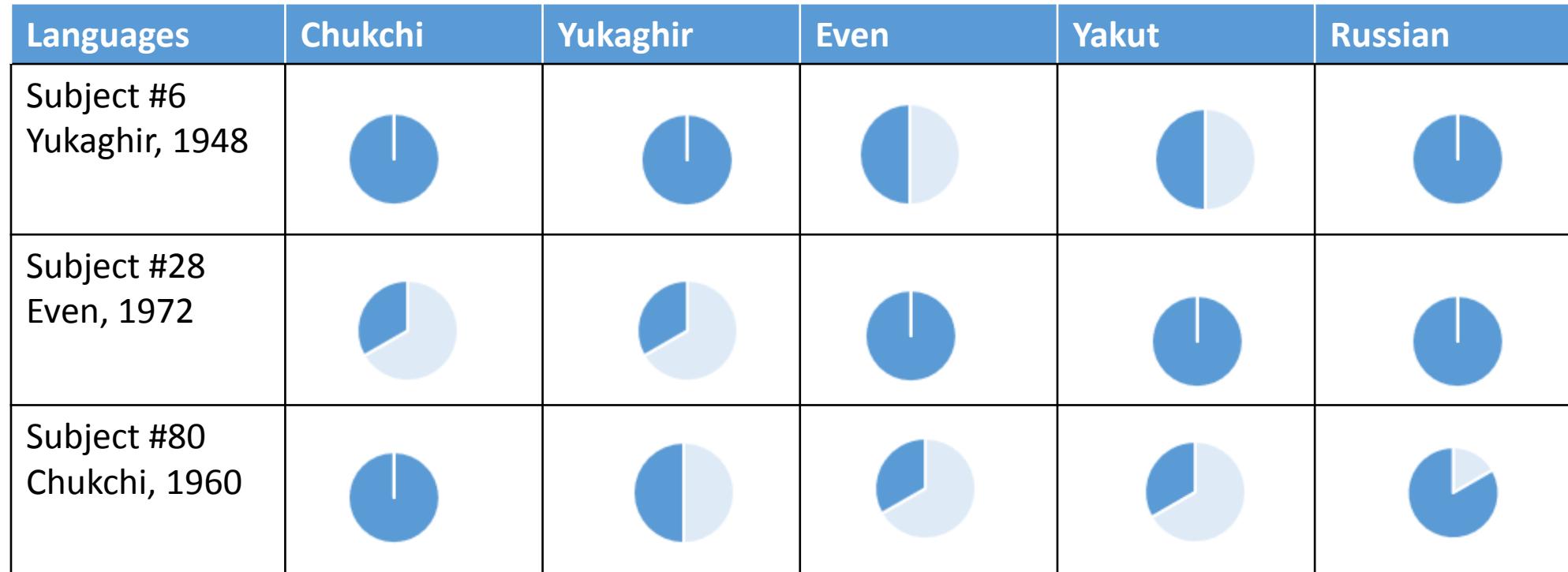
no speaking, nearly  
full understanding



no speaking,  
understanding of  
the main idea



- Three pentalingual subjects reveal tree different profiles once we look at the level of proficiency in each language



full proficiency      speaks well      speaks with errors      uses simple phrases, full understanding      no speaking, nearly full understanding      no speaking, understanding of the main idea



# Caveats of our methodology

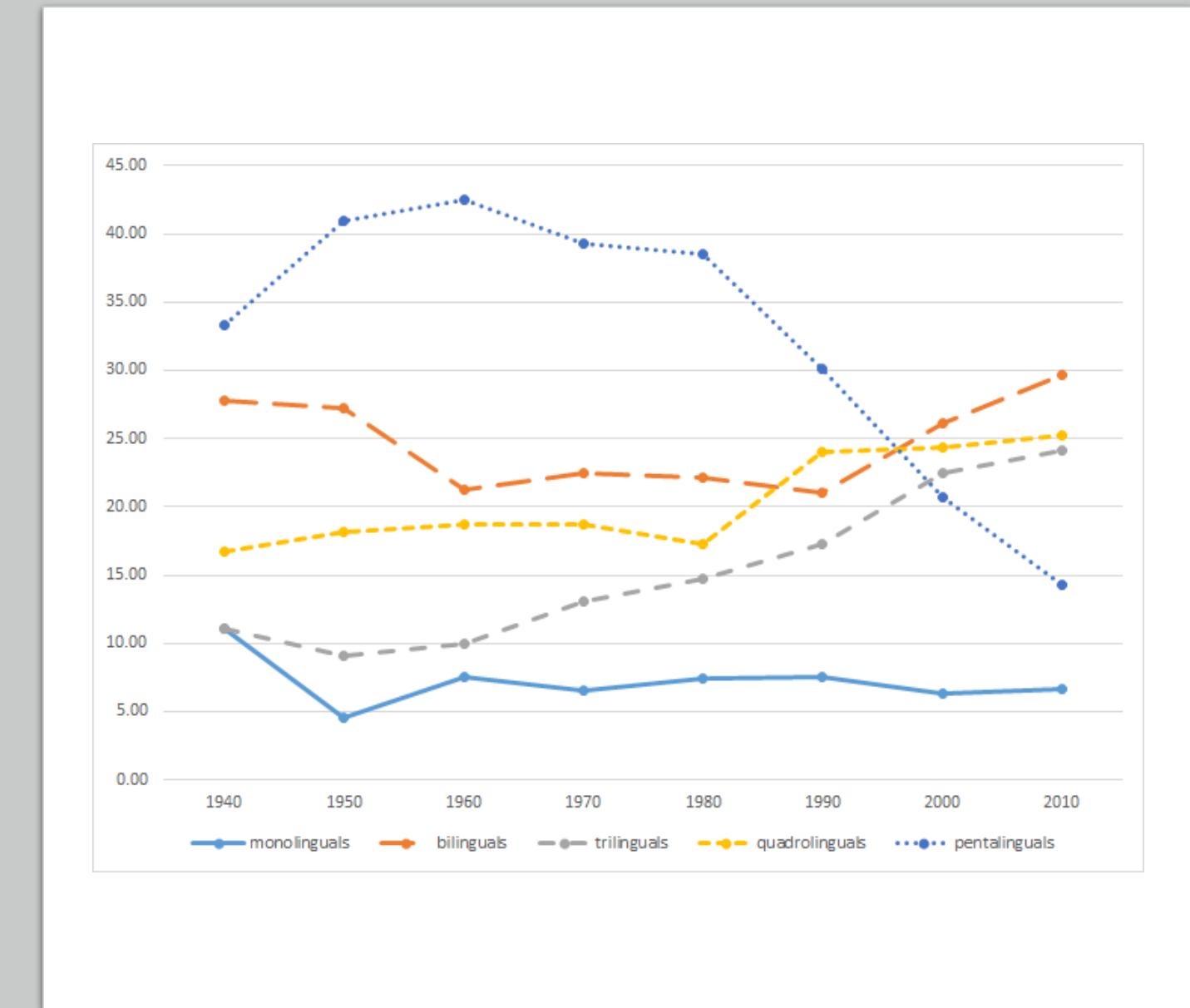
- The level of proficiency has not been measured objectively, but is based on the subjective speaker's judgement.
- The data on the proficiency for the speaker's parents/caregivers are even less reliable, since they are based on their memories, impression, knowledge of parents' biographies and hence might be only approximations.

# Reconstruction of multilingualism: first results presented in Pupynina & Aralova (forthc.)

- An attempt to track the patterns of multilingualism in the LK area throughout the 20th century using the parameter of individual language repertoires.
- An approach which integrates sociolinguistic data, the history and the language policy of the area and the linguistic evidence of the language contact.
- This study did not take into account the level of proficiency and ethnic (self-)identification.

## Number of multilinguals per decade

- A great deal of people could have a command five languages of the area for at least half of 20<sup>th</sup> century (the most popular repertoire in 1940- early 1990s)
- Dramatic decrease of pentalingualism after 1980
- Rise of bilingualism (Russian+one indigenous language) since 1950



# Historical background

- LK Chukchi, Even, Yukaghirs, Yakut and even indigenous Russian residents traditional economy was of a nomadic nature. They had to travel 2, 5, 20 and more times in a year to make their living.
  - In 1940s, the locals became ‘members’ of the newly established small districts (*naslegs*) and employees of *kolkhozes*
  - The population of several smaller ethnic villages and reindeer-breeding camps were forcedly resettled to the ‘capitals’ of two *naslegs*, Andryushkino and Kolymskoye.
  - This increased intercultural contacts and interethnic marriages.
  - Boarding schools were one of the domains where multilingualism practices increased and functioned.
- ! Historical data show that before the Soviet Rule, multilingualism existed, but in a rather limited way. Only certain gender and age groups were multilingual.

# Linguistic outcomes of multilingualism

- We observed certain linguistic traits indicative of the contacts among Even, Yukaghir, Chukchi and Yakut.
  - **Even:** - strongly influenced by **Yakut** on lexical and structural levels; Russian words borrowed via **Yakut**;
    - a number of lexical borrowings from **Yukaghir** (kinship terms, culture-specific objects);
    - very few lexemes borrowed from Chukchi.
  - **Yukaghir:** - lexical borrowings from **Yakut**; Russian words borrowed via **Yakut**;
    - a number of lexical borrowings from **Even** (including kinship terms, Kurilova (2016));
    - minimal Chukchi influence.
  - **Chukchi:** very little traces of contact-induced changes.

# Linguistic outcomes of multilingualism

- Different linguistic outcomes match the differences in contact length and intensity which we infer from the literature on historical and ethnographic data:
  - Yakut influence (stronger on Even than on Yukaghirs)
  - Long-standing Yukaghirs-Even contacts, resulting in mutual lexical borrowings (Jochelson 1926)
  - Chukchi standing apart and not participating in language contact.
  - Rather recent situation of language contact triggered by the Soviet system, which created new locality-based domains for multilingualism

# Boarding school dorms as initial domain for multilingualism

- In two major villages of the newly established villages, Andryushkino and Kolymskoye, school dorms were the places where the children of different ethnic groups first met.
- Our data allowed us to compare linguistic repertoires of people who studied in Kolymskoye and Andryushkino. The hypothesis was that that two locations will show different patterns of language repertoires

# Boarding school dorms as a domain for multilingualism: Andryushkino vs. Kolymskoye



# Location/school influencing repertoires

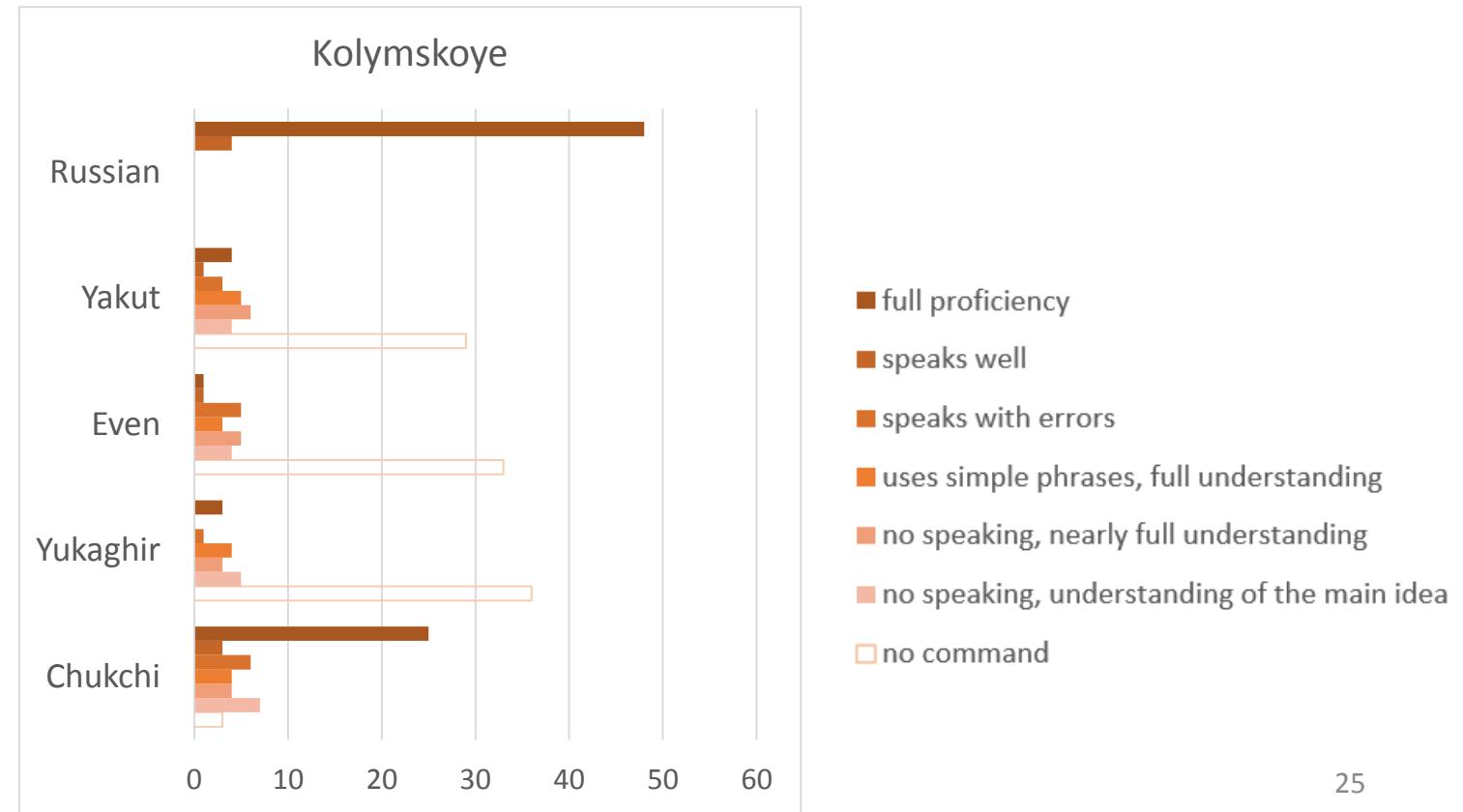
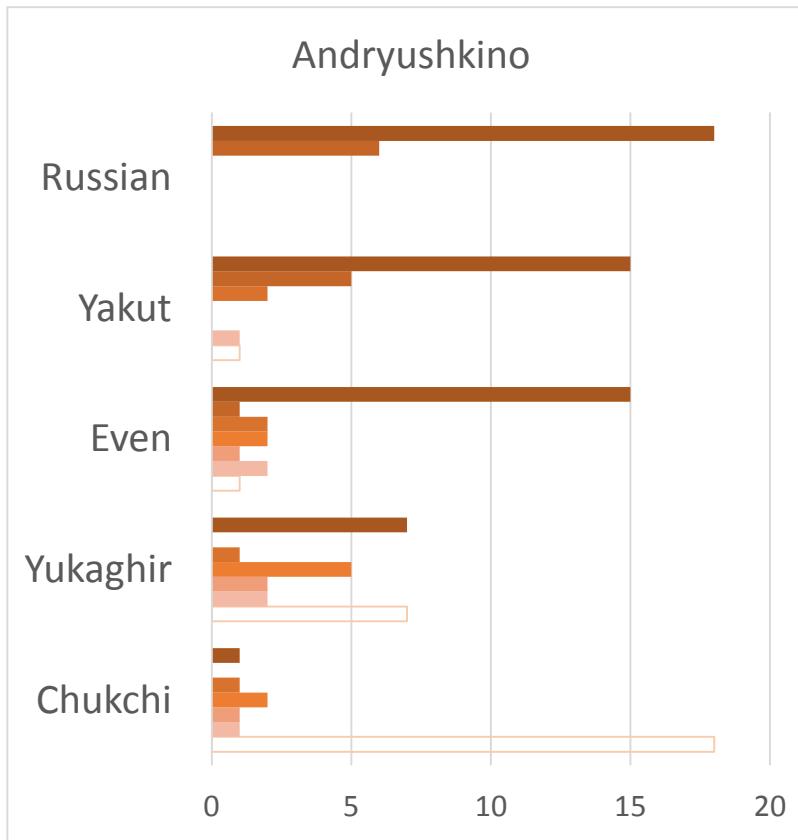
In Pupynina & Aralova (forthc.) we show considerable differences in repertoires related to school location:

- Kolymskoye shows more diverse repertoires.
- the repertoires are mutually distributed
- Most graduates from Kolymskoye show some knowledge of Chukchi

Andryushkino (26 respondents):		Kolymskoye (52 respondents):	
Monolinguals		Monolinguals	
Russian	0	Russian	1
Bilinguals		Bilinguals	
Chukchi/Russian	0	Chukchi/Russian	19
Even/Russian	1	Even/Russian	0
Yakut/Russian	0	Yakut/Russian	2
Trilinguals		Trilinguals	
Chukchi/Yukaghir/Russian	0	Chukchi/Yukaghir/Russian	4
Chukchi/Even/Russian	0	Chukchi/Even/Russian	4

# Location/school influencing repertoires: new data

- For the same subjects we now check the **level of proficiency** in each language



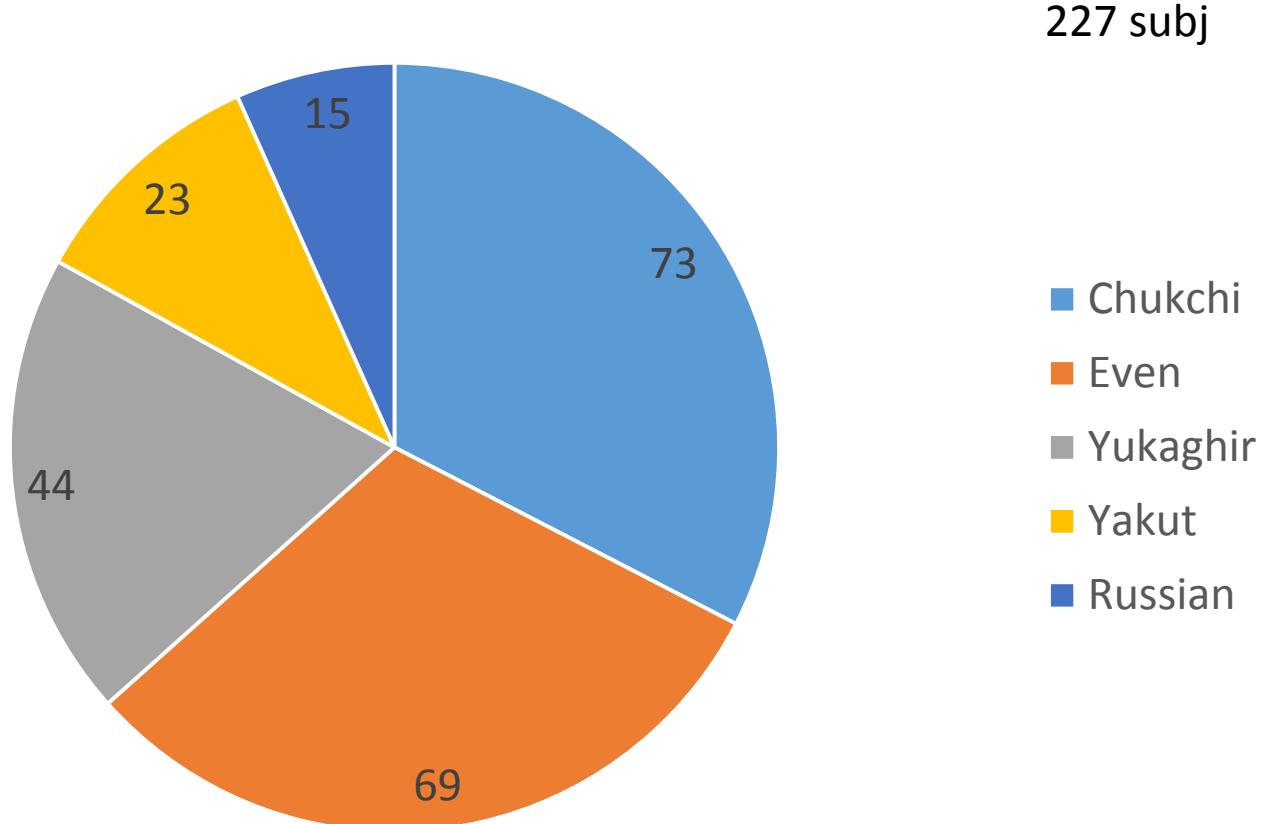
# Location/school influencing repertoires: intermediate results

- Despite the fact that in Kolymskoye we see more diverse picture with respect to repertoires, i.e. more combinations of languages, in terms of proficiency it's very much Chukchi-oriented school.
- In opposite, there are twice less combinations in Andryushkino, but proficiency level of Even, Yakut and Yukaghir is strikingly higher among the alumni of Andryushkino school
- Overall, Andryushkino and Kolymskoye show different patterns with respect to the linguistic repertoires and to the proficiency in different languages.

# Further factors?

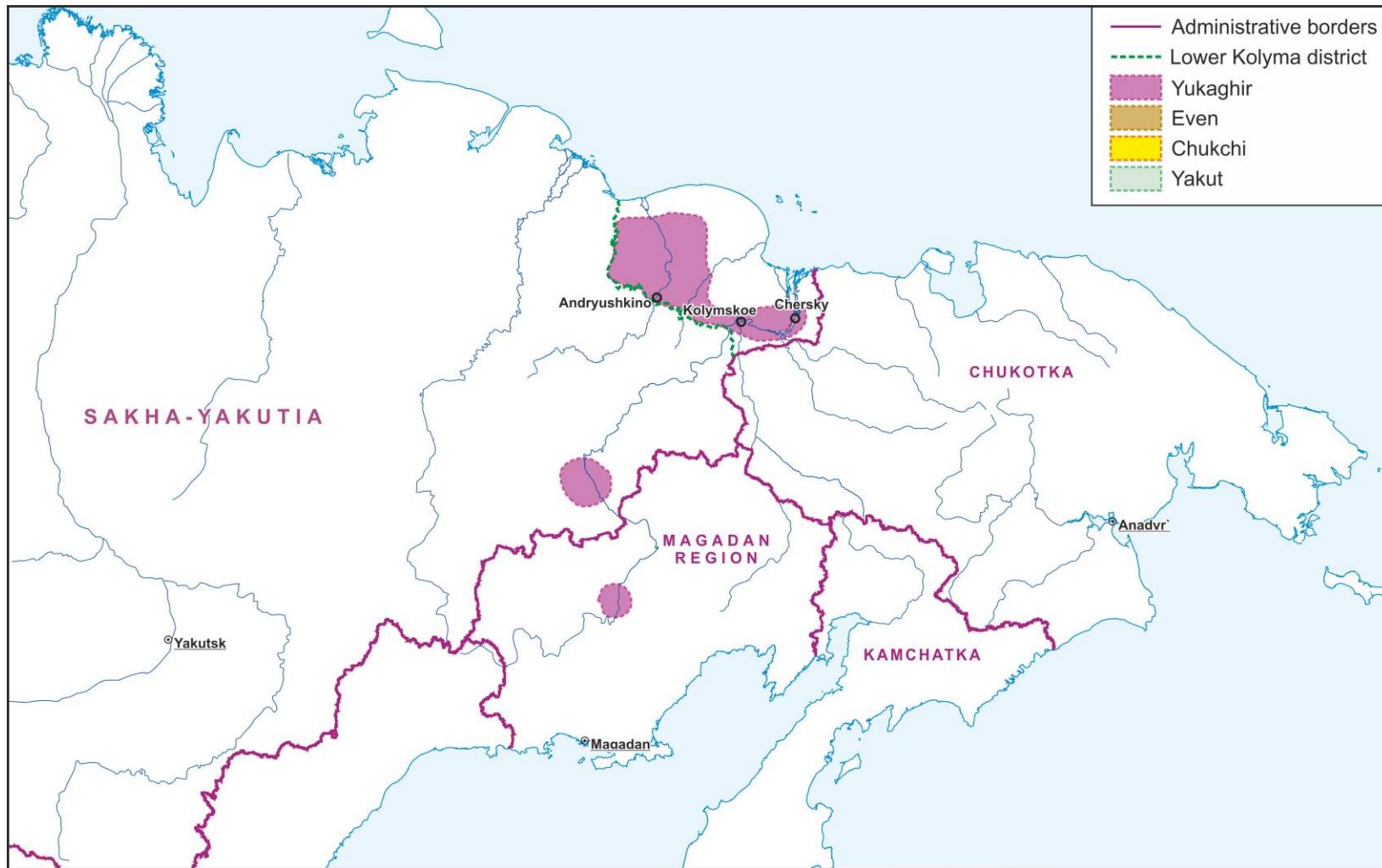
- Probably, it is not only location that influences one's linguistic repertoire
- Five cultures co-exist in the region, and people are used to identify themselves with one or two of the five ethnicities.
- Our data allow us to check if ethnic self-identification has an influence on multilingual patterns.

# Ethnic composition of the data\*

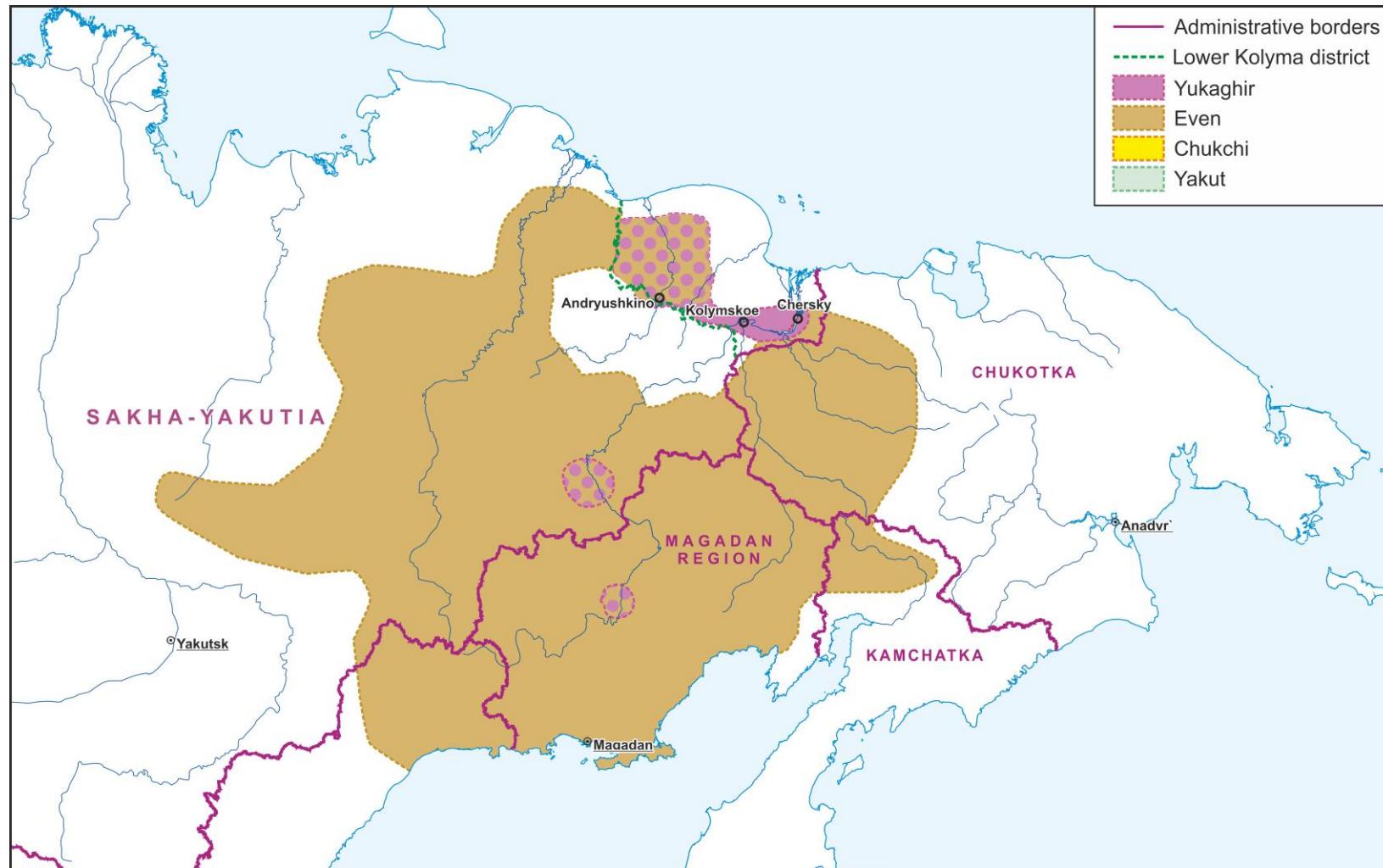


\*as reported by subjects about themselves and their parents

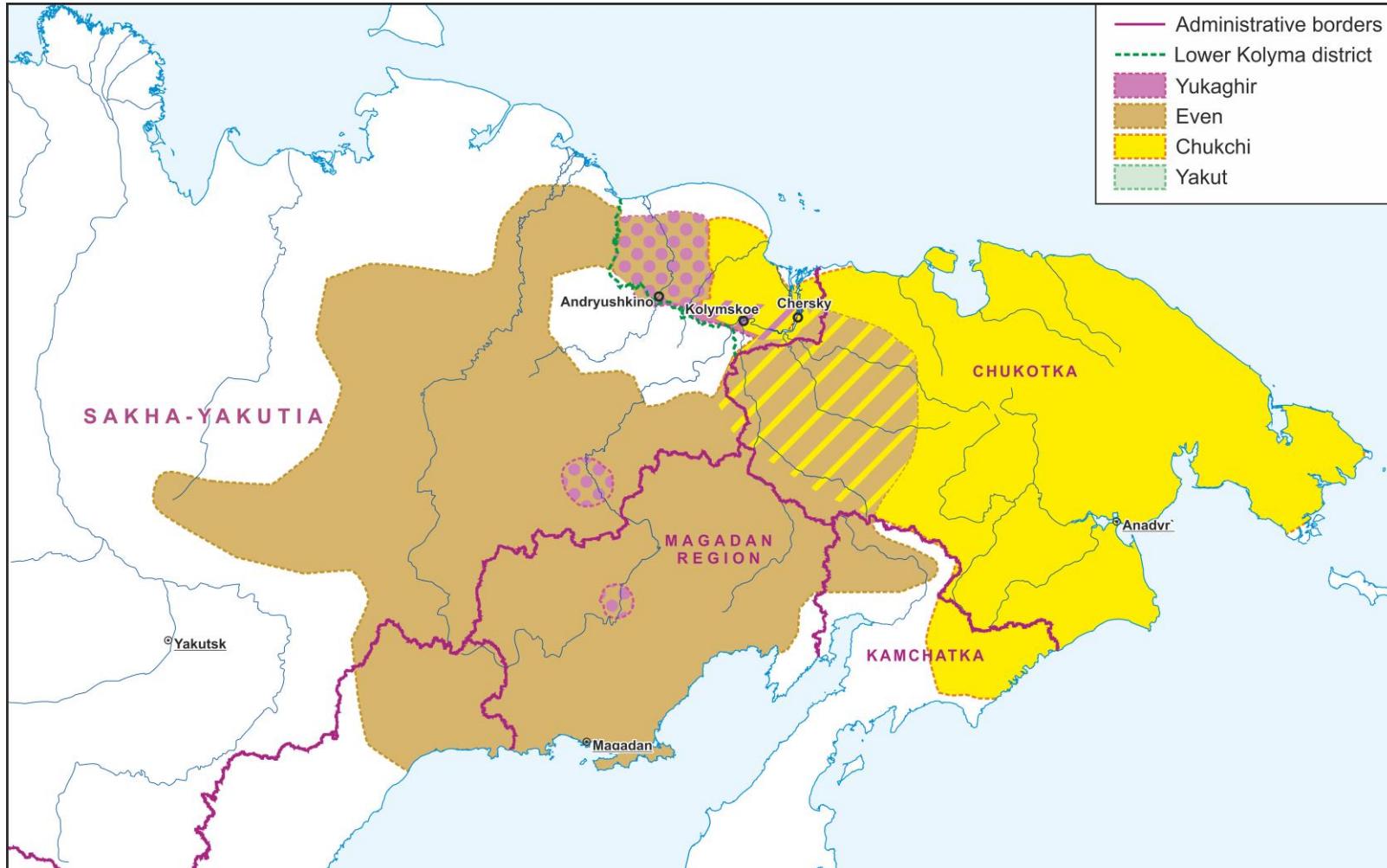
# Yukaghirs on the map of Northeastern Asia



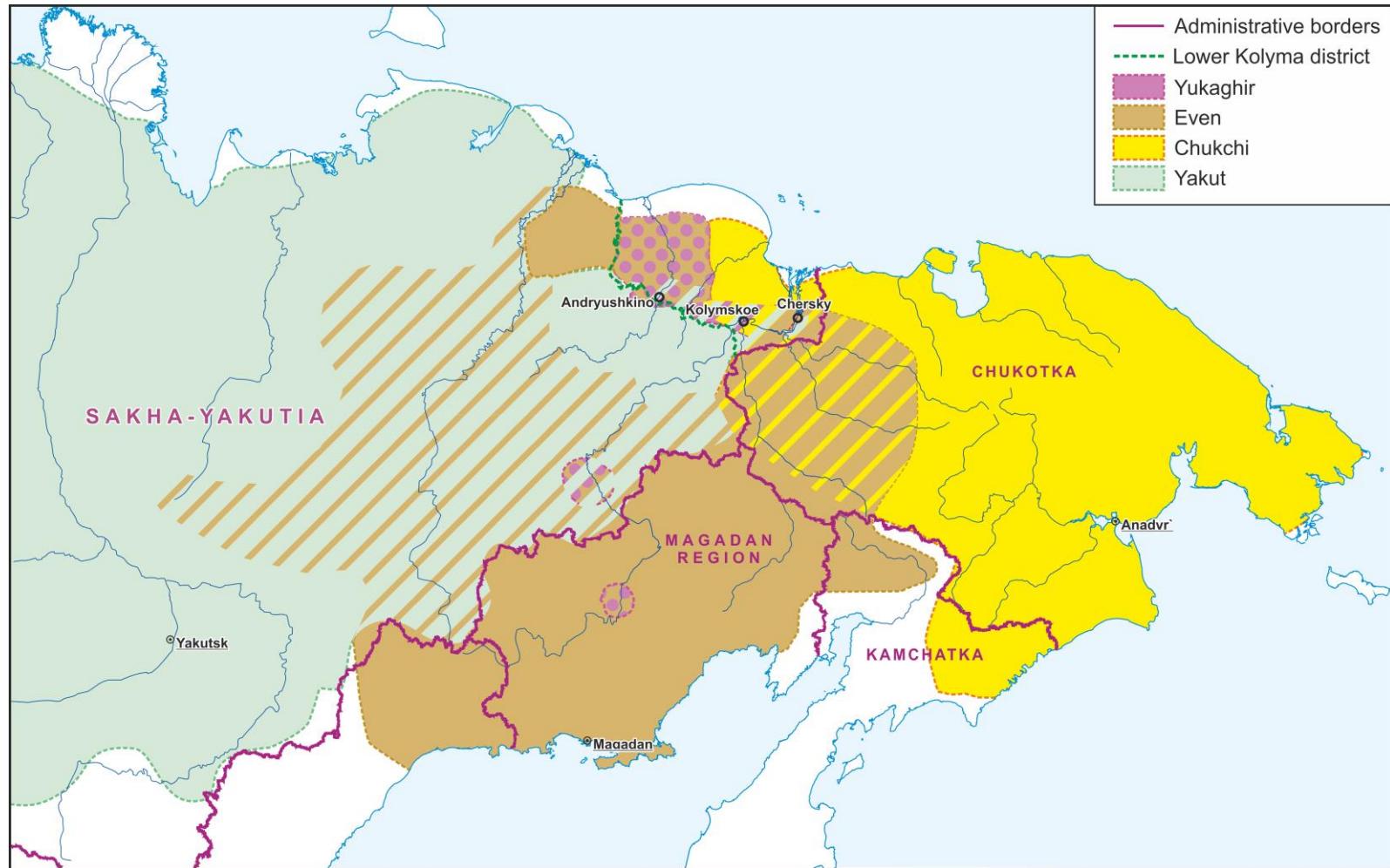
# Yukaghirs and Evens on the map of Northeastern Asia



# Yukaghirs, Evens and Chukchis on the map of Northeastern Asia



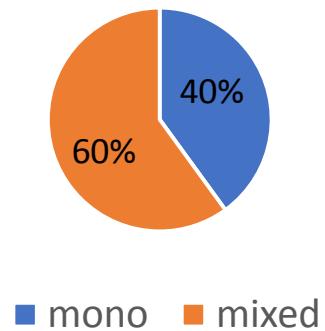
# Yukaghirs, Evens, Chukchis and Yakuts on the map of Northeastern Asia



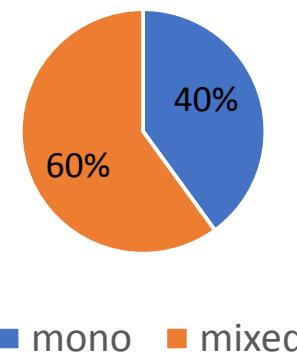
# Important note: mixed marriages

- about 60% of our respondents report their parents to be of different ethnic origin

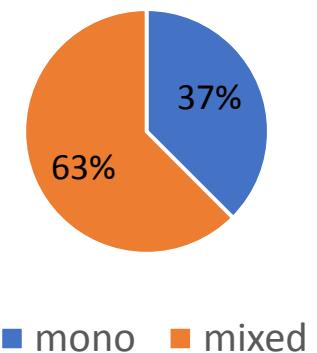
Chukchis



Evens



Yukaghirs



# Another important note: Ethnic identity

- Relational identities

Choice of identity is not a permanent quality, it depends on the communicative event and its circumstances (cf. Di Carlo&Good 2014, Lüpke 2016, Dobrushina et al. forthc.)

- Double identities: in a few cases respondents chose to identify themselves/ their parents, referring to two ethnic groups, e.g. Even/Yakut, Chukchi/Yukaghirs
- Ethnic identity “appropriation”: three respondents from Kolymskoye identify themselves as Chukchi although none of their parents was Chukchi (one mono-ethnic Even family, and two Even-Yukaghirs families), that matches their linguistic repertoire: all three are Russian/Chukchi bilinguals.

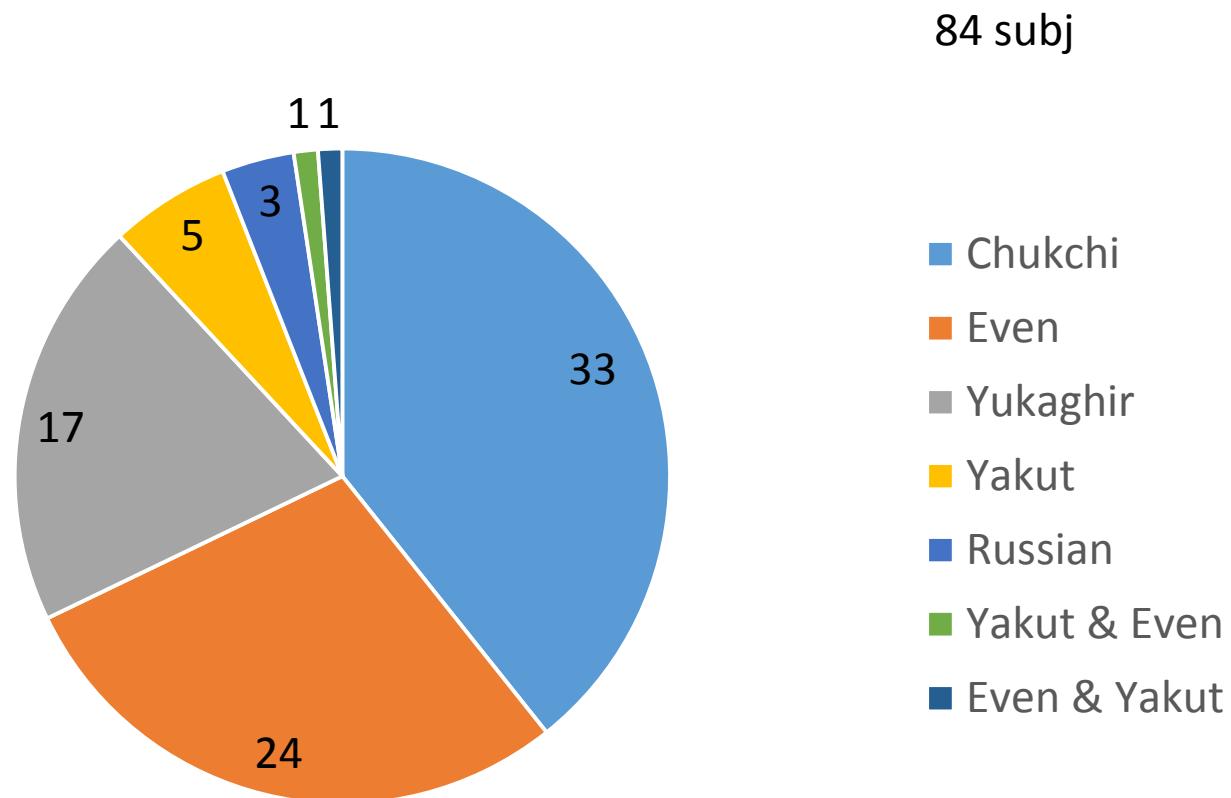
# Mixed cultures and identities in LK

- Participants of Chukchi ‘congress’ in Kolymskoye
- All of them are of mixed origin and not necessarily always call themselves Chukchi
- All are wearing Even/Yukaghir hats

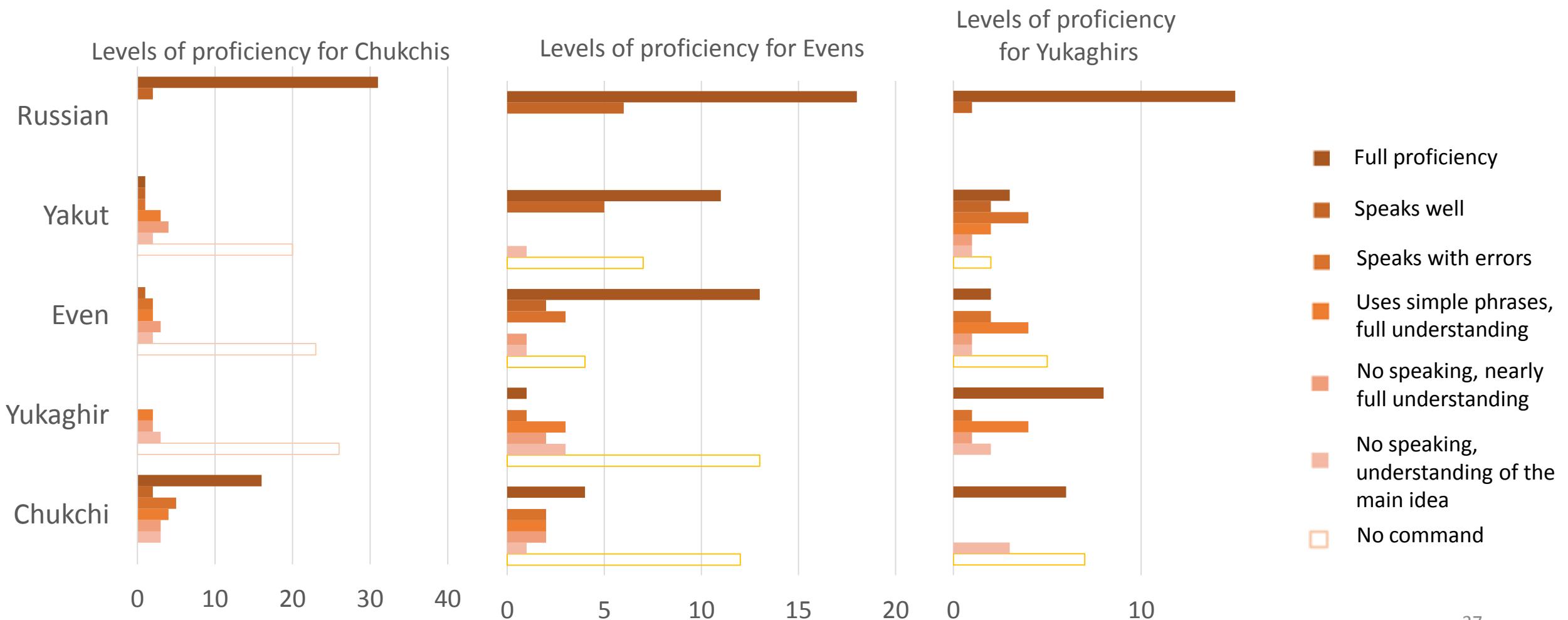


<http://archive.yisia.ru/obshhestvo/chukchi-yakutii-vybrali-novogo-lidera/>

# Ethnic composition of the first-hand data: self-identification



# Ethnic self-identification and proficiency levels



# Ethnic self-identification and proficiency levels - results?

- Chukchis: high proficiency in Chukchi and Russian; no Yakut language
- Evens: high proficiency in Even, Yakut and Russian; various degrees of proficiency in Chukchi
- Yukaghirs: high proficiency in Russian and Yukaghir, various degrees of proficiency in Yakut, about a third of respondents report high level of Chukchi.

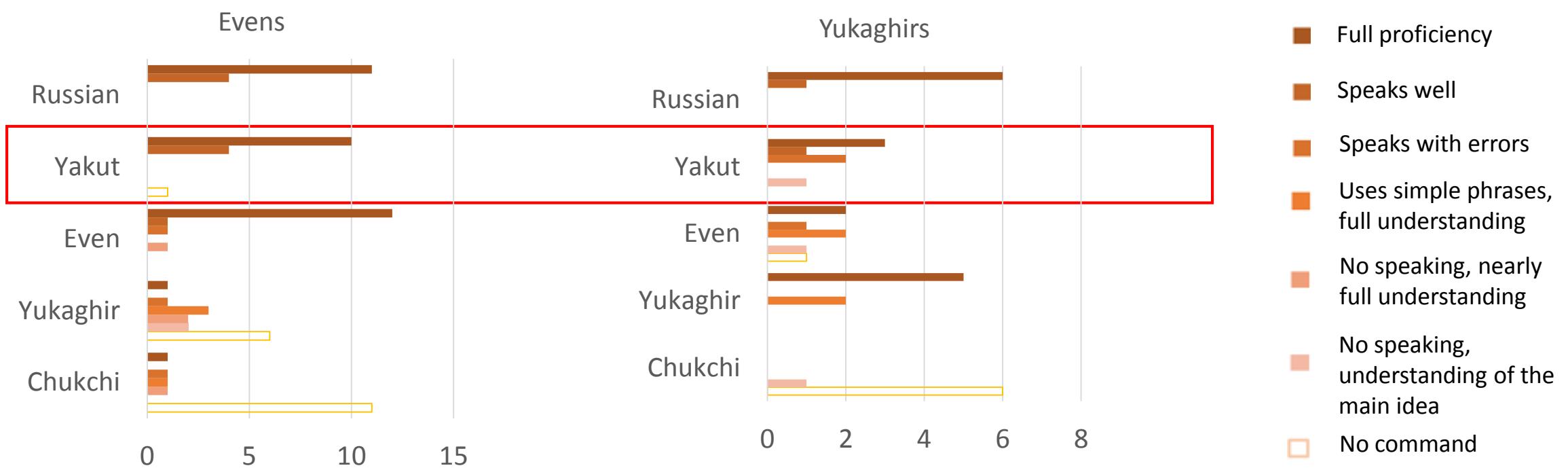
→ It seems as if the patterns of proficiency levels are different for these three ethnicities

But let's have a closer look at the levels of different languages in two main localities paying attention to the ethnicity

# Location/school influencing multilingualism

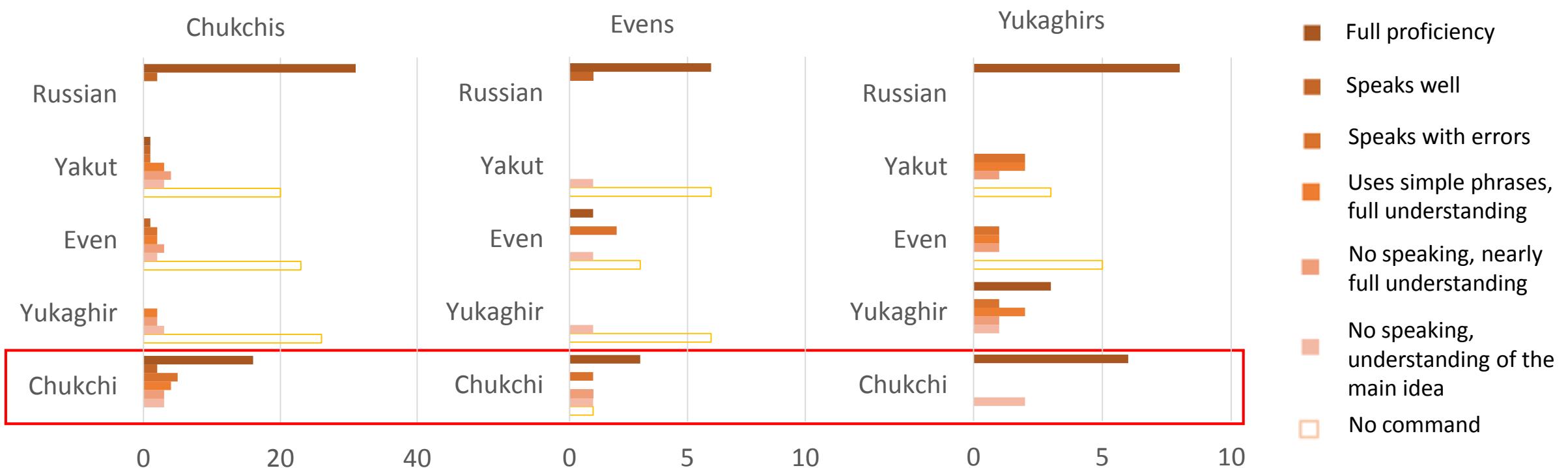
Andryushkino (no Chukchi in the sample):

High proficiency in Yakut is better explained by locality (Andryushkino), not by ethnicity



# Location/school influencing multilingualism

Kolymskoye: High proficiency in Chukchi among all ethnicities is explained by locality factor



# Location/school influencing multilingualism

- Andryushkino:
  - relatively high proficiency of Yakut for both Evens and Yukaghirs
  - high proficiency of Even for Evens and Yukaghir for Yukaghirs
  - low to no proficiency in Chukchi
- Kolymskoye:
  - proficiency in Chukchi is higher than proficiency in Even for Evens and higher than proficiency in Yukaghir for Yukaghirs;
  - Yakut is less proficient than in Andryushkino
- The traced patterns of multilingualism are not particularly related to the ethnicity, but to the location.

# Results. Historical prerequisites for LK multilingualism

- Five cultures and five languages existed in LK area at the time when administrative district was created.
- For Even, Chukchi and Yakut cultures, Lower Kolyma was a border of their whole territory which was generally much bigger than this area.
- All the locals were aware of each other, successfully and peacefully co-existed, and experienced cultural interference
- In northern nomadic communities like Lower Kolyma cultural interference seems to develop slower due to the big distances they have to travel. Multilingualism, in turn, tend to develop only to limited extent.

# Results. Reasons for rapid spread of LK multilingualism

- Unintentionally, Soviet administration created domains for multilingualism because a lot of people of different cultures were brought together in *sovkhозes* (reindeer-breeding brigades) and villages. Especially, children who lived in the school dorms, were exposed to each other's languages, and these children later constituted village population
- Mixed marriages increased.
- High migration level remained and increased, because new ways of transportation were introduced.
- In the melting pots of the newly created settlements, cultural and economic differences became less important, but instead, a unique multilingual social network appeared.

# Results. Reasons for location split in LK multilingualism

- While multilingualism became typical for the whole region, there still are geographical differences in multilingual patterns (repertoires and proficiency) in Andryushkino (west) and Kolymskoye (east).
- **Kolymskoye** is closer to Chukchi core territory, and Chukchi language and traditional economy/culture were significantly important during its early years.
- **Andryushkino** is further away from Chukchi cultural area. Historically, there were more Even and Yukaghir presence in this area and further to the west. High proficiency in Yakut among graduates of Andryushkino school also shows that Olyorinskiy subdistrict was more exposed to Yakut economic/cultural influence than Khalerchinskiy one, though both were administratively Yakut.
- Despite rapid cultural and economic interference, ethnic self-identification plays its secondary role: ethnicities and multilingualism still correlate in two localities differently.

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