

## LANGUAGES OF TAJMYR IN CONTACT: THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY<sup>1</sup>

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The Tajmyr peninsula in the very north of central Siberia is home to five indigenous languages: three northern Samoyedic (Tundra Nenets, Enets, and Nganasan), one Turkic (Dolgan), and one Tungusic (Evenki). Tundra Nenets, spoken today by ca. 1800 individuals from ca. 3000 ethnic Tundra Nenets of Tajmyr, is represented by a specific Tajmyrian dialect. Enets has two dialects, Forest and Tundra, which are quite similar linguistically, but whose speakers constitute two separate language communities and count themselves distinct ethnic groups, so for purposes of a sociolinguistic description, they are kept apart (each Enets variety is spoken by ca. 12 individuals from the corresponding ethnic group, each comprising ca. 90 people). The most western Dolgan dialects spoken in the central Tajmyr are quite different from the most eastern Dolgan dialects spoken in the northern Yakutia; the latter are in their turn almost identical to Yakut, but there is no sharp boundary in this dialect chain (Tajmyrian Dolgans number ca. 5400, from whom ca. 800 speak Dolgan). Nganasan is spoken today by ca. 50 individuals from ca. 700 ethnic Nganasans; Nganasan has two close varieties, western (Avam) and eastern (Vadej). Evenki is spoken by less than 10 individuals from ca. 270 Evenkis at the very south of Tajmyr; this area is not included into the present study. From the 19<sup>th</sup> century on, Russian has also been present in the area, and since the 1960s a language shift is ongoing, resulting in moribund status of Enets, Nganasan, and Tajmyrian Evenki, and seriously endangering Tajmyrian Tundra Nenets and Dolgan. Moreover, today Russian has replaced all local *lingua francas*, and traditional multilingualism patterns have all been lost.

The central question of this paper is to what extent all these languages were used outside their ethnic communities before the omnipresence of Russian, and if so, which the patterns of the multilingualism were. Who could speak several languages? With whom and when was each language actually used? How did these multilingual practices change during the 20<sup>th</sup> century? (Khanina & Meyerhoff, *Subm*) have reconstructed patterns of Tajmyrian multilingualism for the period 1850s-1930s based on traditional Enets narratives recorded in the 1930s, but little is known on what happened next, and how exactly the colorful picture of many languages has been replaced by Russian only.

To answer these questions, I conducted 35 extended semi-structured interviews in different locations of Tajmyr in summer 2017; all interviewees were born before the 1970s, and most of them – before the 1960s, with some individuals born in the 1920s-1930s. These interviews aimed to reconstruct biographies of the respondents' older relatives (parents, grandparents, and their siblings) with particular attention to their linguistic repertoires, their typical interlocutors in each language, and migrations within Tajmyr. As a result, a data bank of individual histories for more than 100 individuals born in the 1900s-1940s has been created, with details for many individuals cross-confirmed from several sources (many of the respondents were related, which is typical for small ethnic groups).

The processing of the data bank has just started, and this paper is devoted to the first generalizations that emerge from the data. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were several contact zones around Tajmyr, most of which have disappeared by now. From west to east, it is (1) the Forest Enets – Tundra Nenets contact zone on the banks of the Yenisey river, around modern settlements of Potapovo and Tukhard, (2) the Tundra Enets – Tundra Nenets – Nganasan contact zone on the eastern bank of the lower Yenisey, around the modern settlement of Vorontsovo, (3) the Tundra

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Enets – Nganasan contact zone between the rivers Yenisey, Pjasina, and even Dudypta, whose inhabitants were settled in the 1960-1970s to the villages of Ustj-Avam and Volochanka, further east of their traditional lands, (4) the Nganasan – Dolgan contact zone that started from the Dudypta river in the west and extended till the Khatanga river in the east. For each contact zone, patterns of indigenous multilingualism are reconstructed. E.g. in contact zones (1) and (3), almost identical patterns of indigenous bilingualism could be observed: (a) Forest Enets married into Tundra Nenets families in the north-west of (1), (b) Tundra Nenets married into Forest Enets families in the south-east of (1), (c) Tundra Enets married into Nganasan families in (3). In all cases, the language of the ethnic group dominant in the area was the language of the family and the language used in communication with children. At the same time, the native language of the person who married into the area was actively used as a means of communication with adults of the same ethnic origin, who were usually quite numerous in the area. Besides, family visits to the place of birth of the in-married spouse were also common, and then his/her native language was also actively used by adults. Importantly, cases (a) and (c) featured both men and women who married into areas where a different ethnic group was more numerous. The patterns of language use in (2) were more complicated due to more languages involved, and the patterns of language use in (4) were characterized by virtual lack of mixed households, though the basic knowledge of the language of their close neighbors was common both for the Dolgans and the Nganasans.

The paper will present these and some other results of the study with more details and illustrative maps, and will trace perspectives for spotting recent contact-induced language change.

## References

Khanina, Olesya & Meyerhoff, Miriam. A case-study in historical sociolinguistics beyond Europe: reconstructing patterns of multilingualism of a language community in Siberia. Submitted to *Journal of historical sociolinguistics*.