

MULTILINGUALISM IN THE NORTHEASTERN YAKUTIA AND CHUKOTKA: COMPARING SOCIOLINGUISTIC, HISTORICAL-SOCIOLINGUISTIC, AND LINGUISTIC APPROACHES ¹

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In this talk, we will present the results of three-year research on multilingualism in the downstream tundra of Kolyma and Alazeya rivers. Over this period, we conducted a series of expeditions to Yakutia and Chukotka, and a vast literature research on different anthropological issues of all ethnic groups inhabiting the region.

Working in the field, we concentrated on collecting sociolinguistic, historical-sociolinguistic and linguistic types of data.

The starting point of our research was the evidence that, in the downstream tundra of Kolyma and Alazeya, several individuals could speak four languages apart from Russian: Chukchi, Even, Yukaghir and Yakut. A lot of others could speak three and four, and they claimed, that the generation of their parents was even more multilingual.

The first step was to check this information through the series of open-ended interviews collected from the people who originated from two villages downstream Kolyma (Cherskii and Kolymskoye) and Alazeya (Andryushkino). We asked questions about people's origin (if they were born and raised in the nomadic brigade or in the village), the languages they could speak, the domains in which the languages were used, which was a sociolinguistic part. The same questions were asked about people's parents, and about the general linguistic context of their childhood, which was a historical-sociolinguistic part. Several interviewees could speak only two languages, however, often they could share valuable historical-sociolinguistic data. People, who could remember linguistic repertoires and other biographical information about their grandparents, were encouraged to do so. If a person claimed to speak some language apart from Russian, we asked him/her to say several words in this language, or to tell a story. We even collected several parallel texts in the languages of the region. This part of the study showed that multilinguals' competence in the studied languages was usually very different.

During the next expedition year, we collected quantitative data on the same topic. We created a questionnaire with a closed set of questions (the full version of the questionnaire will be distributed during the talk). The data could be collected orally (registered by the researcher during the short 20-30 minutes interview), or in the written form by the consultants themselves. The results were striking: out of 76 subjects, 50 claimed to be trilingual, quadrilingual, or quintolingual.

The analysis of texts collected by our group and other researchers showed that the biggest linguistic reciprocal influence existed between Yukaghir and Even languages, and Yakut language influenced both of them. The historical and anthropological literature gave the good ground for this kind of linguistic outcomes of the contact.

The analysis of questionnaires, open-ended interviews and literature data showed that another similar contact zone could be Northwestern Chukotka. The difference, according to our hypothesis, was the lack of Yakut influence in Even and presumably extinct Yukaghir speakers. The next field trip research, partly conducted in this region, proved both assumptions. During the same trip, we

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undertook a pilot linguistic research aimed to describe the level of language competence of multilingual consultants.

For this kind of multilingualism studies, the interdisciplinary approach seems to be the most effective. Multilingualism is a dynamic (both in space and time) phenomenon with deep sociocultural roots, and only the overview of historical, historical-sociolinguistic and cultural context together with linguistic and sociolinguistic analysis could help to reveal its inner patterns.