

CHUKCHI LANGUAGE AND BORDERS (IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE AND TODAY)¹

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Until 1950s Chukchi persistently defended borders of their territory, longer than other nations staying more or less independent from Russian and, later, Soviet Empire. Chukchi resistance against external influence is manifested by their unwillingness to use languages of other nations when contacting with them. As the result, in modern Chukchi (except its Southern variant) the number of borrowings is not very high, not taking into account recent borrowings from Russian.

Bering Strait serves as a natural border of Chukchi language in the East. On the Asian coast of Chukchi Sea Chukchi's neighbors are Asian Yupik (Eskimo). Usually Chukchi language was used as lingua franca in marine hunters' villages. Yupik borrowings in Chukchi are rare (some marine animals' names and terms used when hunting in the sea, see [Inenliqej 1978]). Through this 'sea' border Chukchi language acquired several borrowings from English owing to American whalers: *sopa* 'soap', *maneman* 'money', *kentiqej* 'candy', *kriçmən* 'celebration' etc. There is evidence that Chukchi-English 'pidgin' was created in some villages for trade purposes. Another case of mixed language is Chukchi-Swedish simplified language, which was used and documented by members of Nordenskiöld expedition who spent winter in Polar bay. About these cases and Chukchi unwillingness to use other languages and their extensive language-simplifier skills, see [de Reuse 319–320].

There are no natural borders of Chukchi language territory in the west and south. Here Chukchi language area merges with Even, Yukaghir, Yakut, Koryak and, of course, Russian language territories.

In 18–19 centuries, trade exchange between Chukchi and Russians was worked out near the inflows of Kolyma River, on the western border of Chukchi area. However, Chukchi rarely spoke Russian there: instead, Russians learned to speak some Chukchi-Russian 'jargon' mentioned by V. Bogoras [Bogoras 1899: 9]. At the same time, here and a bit more to the south (near the river-head of Omolon) Even and Yukaghir served as herdsmen for rich Chukchi herd-owners. Apparently, they used Chukchi as lingua franca, which conquered with Yakut in this respect (see [Vakhtin 2001: 153–158]). Some elements of Yakut (e.g. *du* particle) penetrated only to Chukchi speech of Even-Yukaghir population.

In the Soviet times, Chukchis were separated by administrative borders of parts of Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, later subjects Russian Federation. The majority of Chukchis live in Chukotsky Autonomous district, though western, Kolyma Chukchi territory is a part of Nizhnekolymsky district of Sakha (Yakutia) republic. There are not many ethnic Chukchi left, though Chukchi language is still spoken by mixed Even-Yukaghir-Chukchi descendants.

A group of southwestern Chukchi, dialectologically similar to Kolyma Chukchi, is now assigned to Penzhinsky district of Kamchatsky Kray (village Ayanka). Ayanka Chukchi speakers do not contact with Koryak, though many of them also speak Even, thus breaking with Chukchi tradition of non-speaking other languages. The reason is that Evens turned to be more numerous and economically successful in the region. However, their Chukchi has not suffered any considerable influence of Even. Another situation has come about Chukchi people of the southern and southeastern borders of Chukchi territory. Some of them were assigned to Olutor district of Kamchatsky Kray where in the villages of Achayvayam, Khailino and Sredniye Pakhachi they had to work for Soviet reindeer-breeding farms together with more numerous Koryaks. As the result, Koryak-

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influenced variant of Chukchi, not very well understandable by other Chukchis, has arisen. This Chukchi variant has been influenced by Chavchaven Koryak on all linguistic levels.

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