

Two approaches to reversing language shift and the Soviet publication program for indigenous minorities

Deux approches pour contrer le changement langagier et le programme soviétique d'édition pour les minorités autochtones

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Résumé de l'article

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Two approaches to reversing language shift and the Soviet publication program for indigenous minorities

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L'article discute de l'interaction entre la politique soviétique officielle concernant les langues indigènes des «minorités du Nord» et les attitudes de ces communautés envers leurs propres langues et envers leur mise en danger. L'auteur exploite les statistiques du programme soviétique étatique de publication d'ouvrages en langues indigènes (essentiellement des manuels pour l'école primaire), lancé par l'État dans les années 1920, et qui subit des modifications considérables au cours des décennies suivantes. La thèse développée est que les programmes de publication pour les langues minoritaires du Grand Nord ont tous obéi à peu près au même schéma et ont connu les phases suivantes: un début flamboyant dans les années 1930, interrompu par la guerre, puis une reprise vigoureuse dans les années 1950, ainsi qu'un abandon dans les années 1960-70, suivi d'une résurrection dans les années 1980, à son tour interrompue par la crise économique du début des années 1990. La plus intéressante, et la moins claire des phases étudiées est celle de la reprise qui va du milieu des années 1950 jusqu'à la fin des années 1970. Les changements intervenus dans la politique de l'État peuvent être mis en rapport avec ceux dans l'attitude des communautés vis-à-vis de leurs propres langues natales. Une politique de préservation et de revitalisation de la langue ne saurait avoir de succès que si elle est soutenue tant par les communautés indigènes que par l'État.

Abstract: Two approaches to reversing language shift and the Soviet publication program for indigenous minorities

The present paper discusses the interplay between the Soviet state policy towards indigenous languages of "Northern Minorities" and the attitudes of the indigenous communities to their languages and to language endangerment. The author uses statistics on the Soviet state program of publishing books (primarily school books) in indigenous languages that was launched in the late 1920s and underwent considerable changes in the course of the decades to follow. It is argued that the publishing policy for all languages of indigenous minorities of the Far North followed the same consistent pattern that included several phases: "a glorious beginning" in the 1930s interrupted by the war, then a strong continuation in the 1950s, then a drop in the 1960-70s, and a resurrection in the 1980s, interrupted by the economic crisis of the early 1990s. The most interesting and the least clear period is the two and a half decades between mid-1950s and late 1970s where changes of the state policy may be connected with changes in community attitudes towards their native languages. A successful policy of language

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preservation and revitalization is possible only if it is supported simultaneously by the state and the indigenous community.

Introduction

The aim of the present paper is to discuss the interplay between the Soviet state policy towards indigenous languages of "Northern Minorities" and the attitudes of the indigenous communities themselves to their languages and to language endangerment. Both trends demonstrated in the course of Soviet and post-Soviet history (between the late 1920s and early 2000s) an uneven pattern, with sharp ascents and declines; these ascents and declines can be connected by cause-and-effect relations. I am using here as an illustration statistics on the Soviet state program of publishing books in indigenous languages, that was launched in the late 1920s and underwent considerable changes in the course of the decades to follow.

Two trends in attitudes towards endangered languages

Today, the policy of developed nations towards minority languages is built around the concept of the ultimate value of *linguistic and cultural diversity*. Governments who carry out this policy explicitly demonstrate their readiness to support endangered languages, that is, to allocate intellectual, financial and social resources to what Joshua Fishman labeled "reversing language shift." Activists and scholars regard language loss and language shift as a sad consequence of modernization, colonialism and post-colonialism; the activities directed against language shift are formulated through the discourse of inequality and suppression.

Already in earlier works scholars emphasized the importance of not losing language richness because languages portray and represent unique world views (*e.g.*, Sapir 1921). However, modern linguists turned their attention to this problem relatively late: the first symposium on endangered languages took place 13 years ago, in 1991. We all know Michael Krauss's important role in this process. We all also know his sad prediction: if the pace of language loss remains the same, a hundred years from now humankind can lose 90% of its languages: that is, out of approximately 6,500 languages, only 650 will survive (Krauss 1992). The motivation of linguists who ardently communicate this concern to the outer world is relatively clear. First of all, of course, there is the natural concern of practitioners in the field which, to quote Krauss again, risks to "go down in history as the only science that presided obliviously over the disappearance of 90% of the very field to which it is

dedicated" (*ibid.*). But even if we set aside these natural feelings of the professionals who lose their object of study, there remains another consideration that is, in my opinion, also quite serious.

This consideration is based on a teleological world view: the diversity of language systems that we see in the world's natural languages must have a reason, a goal. The fact that different languages encode grammatical and lexical information differently; the fact that different languages format reality in different ways, through different sets of grammatical categories, in accordance with this teleological approach, should be explained. In this diversity, there has to be a message that we linguists are still unable to decipher. We still know too little about the language system, and we have to learn much more, so that in the future it will be possible to read this message¹. This is why linguists can not afford the loss of even a half of the world's language, to say nothing of 90%. This consideration alone should be sufficient to encourage all linguists to unanimously support language diversity and, consequently, any measures towards language documentation, protection and revitalization.

Modern Russian legislation takes into consideration these arguments, and generally follows European legal principles in approaching linguistic diversity. Article 10 of the Federal Law "On the Rights of Indigenous Minorities" protects the rights of these minorities to maintain and develop indigenous languages; Article 5 (part 2) allows the government of the Russian Federation to launch federal programs for support and revival of the languages of these minorities. Vladimir Neroznak, the editor of *The Red Book of Languages of Russia*, analyses these legal documents in his introduction, and writes, rather bluntly:

The language of each people is not only a cultural, but also a natural heritage of the humankind [...] this is why all talks and declarations and even theories that the process of language death is allegedly "natural" and that one should not attempt to counter it display attempts to lay a foundation for linguicide and genocide (Neroznak 2002: 7).

He also adds that a special program must be established for revitalization and revival of the languages, their maintenance and development. If there are languages whose disappearance is irreversible, urgent research programs are needed to document the speech of the people and publish the data already collected. The state must do everything it can to stop the process of language shift and reverse it (*ibid.*: 10).

However, a different point of view exists, a rather pessimistic one, according to which language loss is inevitable since it is a natural and an irreversible process: current trends in the development of language situations will ultimately lead to unification and to a sharp decline of cultural and language diversity. The advocates of this approach claim that this process has been allegedly going on for several thousand years and is today speeding up; it will eventually lead to disappearance of the majority of the world's languages. I can refer the reader, among other things, to a recent article written by a well-known Russian linguist, Vladimir Alpatov (2002). After outlining

¹ I am referring here to Alexander E. Kibrik who voiced this consideration several times but has not, to my knowledge, published it.

briefly the history of the Soviet language policy, Alpatov teams up with those who see a positive tendency in the language shift from indigenous languages towards Russian, and concludes that "a forced education in a non-prestigious language imposed on the people is hardly better than forced Russification" (Alpatov 2002: 200).

Obviously, both points of view have a strong political overtone, and are often supported by political arguments. In the introduction of a recent publication on written languages of Russia, the language policy of the state is directly connected with the degree to which this state is "humane and civilized": language and national policy of a state is an indicator of how civilized and advanced its governing principles are (MacConnell and Mikhalchenko 2003: 13). In other words, supporters of language diversity implicitly (and sometimes quite explicitly) call their opponents *un-humane* and *uncivilized*. Supporters of language unification react with equal rigor by accusing the other side of not taking into consideration the voice of the community itself, of imposing on the people an unwanted language.

My position here is clear: I believe in the intrinsic value of linguistic and cultural diversity, and I follow those who demand that the state provide legal, social, and economic vehicles for the development of minority languages, their support and, if needed, revitalization or at least documentation. However, the state alone can, of course, provide only *means* to support minority languages, but it is helpless in achieving any results without active support from indigenous communities. I want to emphasize this: the position of indigenous communities here is of utmost importance—and I mean *communities*, larger groups of people, including people of all ages and social standings, not only the indigenous elites, and perhaps not so much indigenous elites.

Two currents in Russian / Soviet language policy

In the course of the 20th century, there were two currents in language policy and attitudes towards the indigenous languages of the Russian Arctic that intertwined in a strange pattern. The first current was the state language policy itself; the second was the attitude of the Native communities of the North towards preservation of their indigenous languages. Periods of high tide and periods of regression in both do not necessarily coincide: it was often the case that the enthusiasm of the communities about their language receded soon after the state became active in promoting these languages, and *visa versa*: that the communities began to demand language preservation programs soon after the state retreated from supporting them. I am not sure what this asynchronic pattern means but I suspect that there is more behind this pattern than a simple coincidence. The difficult part of researching this pattern is that, while the state policy is openly proclaimed and is relatively easy to pin-point and demonstrate, attitudes of the communities are not. In assessing these attitudes, one has to rely on indirect and uncertain evidence, on impressions, on hints and implications hidden in what one hears and sees in these communities. I realize that this makes part of my argumentation vulnerable and weak.

The data: the Soviet program of publication of books in indigenous languages

Much has been written about Soviet/Russian language policy: I will not waste time by repeating it, and will simply refer the reader to some of the publications, such as Alpatov (1994, 2000); Kreindler (1984); Martin (2001); Pipes (1975); and Vakhtin (2001). In this paper, I will use just one indicator to show the oscillations of the Russian language policy throughout the 20th century, namely, changes in the number of books published in indigenous languages in the Soviet Union and after.

Since the 1930s, the Soviet Union political decision-making system has been often characterized as totalitarian: all political decisions were taken, until Stalin's death in 1953, by the dictator himself, and after 1953, by the Politburo of the Communist Party. All schools and colleges, all publishing houses and research institutes belonged to the State (that is, to the Communist Party). Each had a plan of action approved, through a complicated chain of command, by the top authorities, and incorporated into the country's general plan of development. This means that almost nothing (with some exceptions, naturally) happened in the country's economy or policy that was not approved and written into the plan. In turn, this means that almost everything in the activities "down here" can be used as an indication of political changes "up there." Thus, increase or decrease in the number of books published in indigenous languages, changes in the themes of these books from school aids to political publications to fiction to medical issues to poetry etc. were a clear indication that "up there" in the Politburo, a political change took place—although it may not have been publicly announced.

In my analysis I rely on statistical information from the most complete collection of books in indigenous languages that exists in Russia: the collection is kept in the Department of Books in Languages of Russia at the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg. Theoretically, this collection is 100% complete; in reality, of course, there are gaps and missing books here as anywhere else; still, this "database" seems the most reliable: it covers books in indigenous languages from the earliest (19th century religious and school publications) through the early Soviet books of the 1930s to the most recent books published since the year 2000. I analyzed this collection from several points of view: number of books published in different periods of history; topics, or genres, of books (school aids, fiction, political, medical, poetry, etc.); authorship (indigenous or non-indigenous); the type of the book (original vs. translated), etc. I will also analyze random factors, such as a talented local author or a motivated external researcher or a local publishing house, and show how they can affect the process and influence language and publishing policy. To not inflate the text, I will not give all the data on all languages, but will restrict myself to several illustrations, first by language and then by other topics. First, I will provide data on Yupik, Nenets, Chukchi, Nanai, Mansi, Koryak, and Khanty (the order is arbitrary); these languages show a clear common pattern in the number of books published. I will then use Udeghe, Itelmen, and Ket to show a different pattern of development.

Siberian Yupik

The total number of books in Yupik published between 1932 (the year of the first book, *Xwangkuta ihaput* by Elizaveta Orlova) and 2004 is 93—quite a decent number². The list includes books *in* Yupik: primers, other school books for primary school grades, translations of fiction and non-fiction from Russian, school dictionaries, etc., and does not include books *on* Yupik language: grammars, etc. However, distribution of publications by decade is far from even (see Table 1). From 1932 to 1941, 17 books were published; then we see a five-year gap caused by the war. Two years after the war, in 1947, while the country was still recovering, four books were published, and another six in 1948-1949. In the 1950s, we see the highest harvest: 27 books in 10 years (1950-1959). Then something happened, and in the 1960s there was only one publication, and in the next decade, only four—five in 20 years! A revival can be seen in the 1980s (25 books), and then again, a drastic drop: only nine in the next 14 years.

Table 1. Number of books in Siberian Yupik.

Years	Number of Books
1932-1941	17
1942-1946	0
1947-1949	10
1950-1959	27
1960-1969	1
1970-1979	4
1980-1989	25
1990-1999	4
2000+	5

Nenets

A total of 267 books have been published in Nenets. The first three books in Nenets appeared before the Soviet era: in 1895, a primer for "Samoyeds" of the European part of Russia (Arkhangelsk District); in 1903, a reader on Sacred History (a translation by the Samoyed priest Ioann Egorov); and in 1910, a Russian-Khanty-Nenets practical dictionary by A.A. Dunin-Gorkatich printed in Tobolsk. The first Soviet book came in 1932; like for Yupik, the distribution of books by decade was uneven (see Table 2). The peak comes in the 1950s (72 books), then we see a steady drop (39 in the 1960s, 20 in the 1970s, 18 in the 1980s), and then a slow increase to 21 in the 1990s and to 27 in the first four years of the 20th century.

² Strictly speaking, this is the number of books kept in the collection described above; lacunae in the collections are possible. However, I will assume, in this article, that the collection is complete

Table 2. Number of books in Nenets.

Years	Number of Books
1930-1939	49
1940-1949	18
1950-1959	72
1960-1969	39
1970-1999	20
1980-1989	18
1990-1999	21
2000+	27

Chukchi

The collection holds 466 books in Chukchi; the first book in Chukchi was published in 1898 in Kazan: this was a Russian-Chukchi Dictionary (probably written by Vladimir Bogoraz). The first Soviet-time publication—a primer for Chukchi schools—appeared in 1927, and the first school book (Celgü-kalekal "Red Word") was published in Moscow in 1932; both were compiled by Bogoraz (the latter book in cooperation with Chukchi students). Between 1931 and 1941, 49 books were published (see Table 3); during the war, only two books appeared (in 1944 and in 1945). From the 1950s to the mid-1960s the number of books skyrocketed to reach 228. The decline in the 1960s was not as sharp as in the other two cases shown above; likewise, the revival of the 1980s is less pronounced: we have here 116 books in the 1960s, 86 in the 1970s, and 57 in the 1980s; only 14 were published between 1990 and 2003. One of the reasons of this slower decline was the creation in 1956 of a publishing house (The Magadan Publishing House) in Magadan, the capital of the area. In the early 1950s, the authorities were evidently uncertain where to establish this publishing house, in Magadan or in Khabarovsk: several books were thus printed in both cities. Eventually, Magadan won: from 1956, the number of books in Chukchi published there increased steadily, and when in 1960 the central publisher "Prosveschenie" in Leningrad almost completely ceased to publish indigenous books, the Magadan activities managed to compensate, thus keeping the number of books in Chukchi much higher than that for many other languages, for another decade. Table 3 shows the number of books published in Chukchi by, respectively, Leningrad and Magadan publishers: one can see that, be it not for Magadan efforts, the "Chukchi curve" would look very much like the Yupik or Nenets ones.

Table 3. Chukchi books published in Leningrad and in Magadan.

	Leningrad	Magadan
1931-35	14	0
1936-40	34	0
1941-45	4	0
1946-50	20	0
1951-55	35	14
1956-60	31	60
1961-65	9	74
1966-70	1	32
1971-75	5	33
1976-80	6	24
1981-85	7	24
1986-90	5	22
1991-95	1	2
1996-2000	5	0
2001-2003	2	0

These are, of course, merely numbers; see below for a qualitative analysis of *what* was published in Magadan.

Nanai

On the whole, according to the collection, 229 books were published in Nanai. Of these, 170 came from 1930 to the 1950s. Before the Soviet era, four books had been published (The Gospel According to Matthew in 1884 and two more religious books in 1885 and 1898, and A Gol'd [Nanai] primer for Gol'd and Gilyak Children written by Father Prokopii and published in Kazan by the Orthodox Missionary Society in 1884). The first Soviet book came in 1928 (a school book for the first grade by N.A. Lipskaya-Volrond). Again, the pattern here is very similar to those described above: 59 books in the 1930s, 39 in the 1940s³; then the peak of 72 books in the 1950s, and after that a recession: 17 in the 1960s, only two in the 1970s, then a slow growth: 16 in the 1980s, 13 in the 1990s, and six in the first four years of the 21st century.

Mansi

The collection holds 148 books published in Mansi; only one appeared before 1917: in 1901, a primer was compiled and published by Bishop Nikanor, in cooperation with four other authors, one of them was a Mansi himself. The first two

³ With the same gap for the war years: in 1940 15 books appeared, in 1941 nine, in 1942, 1943, 1944 none, then in 1945 two, in 1946 five, one in 1947, one in 1948, and six in 1949; some of these must have been prepared before the war but had to wait till after 1945 to be printed.

Soviet-time books appeared in 1933 (a primary school reader and a math book); in the 1930s, 27 books were printed, mostly school books and books for children. In 1940, seven books were published, another three in 1941, then we see a familiar gap: no books between 1942 and 1945. In 1946–49, the publication program is slowly resumed: five new books appear. The peak, as elsewhere, is in the 1950s: 58 books; then a sharp recession (eight books in the 1960s, five in the 1970s), then a small growth (12 books in the 1980s; eight in 1990s), and 14 books in the first four years of the 21st century.

Koryak

The picture is so similar to those described above that it needs almost no comments. All in all, the collection holds 130 books. The first book was published in 1926 (a Russian-Even and Russian-Koryak Dictionary printed in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii). The 1930s show a peak—as many as 52 books. The 1940s also show a familiar pattern: 1940 12, 1941 four, then a gap till 1947, with one book in 1947 and three in 1949; then an increase in the first half of the 1950s, and then a drastic drop: four in the 1960s and only one book in the 1970s (*An Optional Course of Koryak for Eighth Grade* by A. I. Yayletkan). A small increase in the 1980s, and then a drop again in the 1990s (see Table 4).

Table 4. Number of books in Koryak.

Years	Number of Books
1920s	1
1930s	52
1940s	20
1950s	27
1960s	4
1970s	1
1980s	15
1990s	6
2000s	4

Khanty

In Khanty, 201 books have been published. Before 1917, there were five; three religious and two school books (one published in Tobolsk in 1895, the other is the same Russian-Khanty-Nenets dictionary that I already mentioned under Nenets). The first Soviet book came in 1931 (Ostyak book for primary learning by P. Khatanzeev); then in 1934–1937 came a primer (1933), a math book for primary school (1934), and several fiction books for children (a Khanty fairy-tale [1934], more fairy-tales [1935]), and two translations from Russian of pieces by Pushkin, a collection of tales for

children and a short story (1937)⁴. Then we see the same pattern again: the peak in the 1950s (41 books), then a sharp decline in the 1960s and 1970s (respectively: 13 and 12 books), with a gradual increase in the 1980s and 1990s. One important difference here is a noticeable recent increase of activities: 27 books published in the first four years of the 21st century. The examples above illustrate the most common pattern: a glorious beginning in the 1930s interrupted by the war, then a strong continuation in the 1950s, then a drop in the 1960s-1970s, and a resurrection in the 1980s, interrupted by the economic crisis.

There is, however, another pattern common for even smaller languages, such as Udeghe, Itelmen, or Ket. This pattern begins more or less like the previous one, with several books published in the 1930s as a rule, due to continuous efforts by an individual, an enthusiast, a scholar who devoted his or her life to the cause of the education of an indigenous group. Then for some reason, the process is interrupted, and there is a long gap—usually until the early 1990s—when no books are published at all. What are the reasons for this abrupt termination of the publishing process (and, with it, also of the school education)? In the case of Udeghe, for example, this was the arrest and prosecution of Dr. Evgenii Schneider—the author of most early books in the language. The first book, *Our Literacy*, compiled by E. Schneider, appeared in 1932, just like with many other languages. It was followed by a reader (1933), a math book (1933), another reader (1934), an Udeghe-Russian dictionary (1936), and four more books; nine books were published in the 1930s, then in 1937 Schneider was arrested and prosecuted (Vasilkov and Sorokina 2003: 424), and the enlightenment of the Udeghe people was terminated for almost 50 years: in 1982, a collection of Udeghe songs was published in Vladivostok; in 1999, a school book; and in 2001, a dictionary. The life of a language depends on the life of human beings, but not necessarily only its speakers...

In the case of Ket, we see a similar story: the author of the first school book (a primer in 1934), Nestor Karger, was arrested in 1935, and, although he was not shot, he could not continue his scholarly work. It was only in the 1990s that scholars from Moscow (Irina Nikolaeva) and from Taganrog (Genrikh Verner) resumed publishing school books in Ket (10 books were published between 1991 and 2002); for the language, it may already be too late (Krivonogov 2004). A similar story, without an apparent loss of one enthusiast, however, can be found in the case of Itelmen: two books in 1930s, then a pause of over 50 years, and then, in 1989, 1991, 1997, and 2001, five school books, all of them compiled by the enthusiastic and talented native scholar Klavdia Khaliomova, some with the assistance of Dr. Alexander Volodin.

This sad list can be continued. Yukagir and Nivkh language histories may have been different if Erukhim Kreinovich (1906-1985) had not been purged: he was arrested in 1937, spent 10 years in Gulag, returned to academic work, was arrested again in 1948, and released in 1954 (Vasilkov and Sorokina 2003: 221). In spite of the

⁴ In fact, Pushkin's poetry and prose was translated into almost all indigenous languages; the translations were mostly published around 1937 when Stalin ordered to organize a huge all-Union celebration of the 100th anniversary of Pushkin's death in order to demonstrate the change of state policy from "proletarian internationalism" to strengthening of a Communist empire built around the Russian national, political, language, and cultural core.

tragic loss of 16 years of his life, Kreinovich wrote and published several books on Nivkh and Yukagir grammars, but had no time to do any books for the indigenous schools.

What was published

It would be a mistake to think that all books published in the languages of the Northern Minorities were aimed at developing school education and supporting the languages. The ideological mission of the publishing program was also there. Naturally, for a Communist totalitarian state, all school literature, fiction, and books for children were soaked with ideological indoctrination. But there was also a large portion of books that were directly and exclusively ideological and political propaganda: translations into indigenous languages of Communist Party decrees, speeches by Communist leaders (not only Stalin, but others as well), and political journalism (see Table 5).

Table 5. Nenets books by type.

	school books	children's books	fiction	poetry	veterinary	political and journalism	Total
1930-39	18	9	3	0	6	13	49
1940-49	6	4	0	0	0	0	10
1950-59	38	13	1	1	3	1	57
1960-69	10	4	2	3	0	1	20
1970-79	10	1	0	0	0	4	15
1980-89	10	1	0	3	0	0	14
1990-99	11	1	0	0	0	0	12
2000+	18	1	3	2	0	0	24
Total	121	34	9	9	9	19	201
% of Total	60%	17%	4%	4%	4%	9%	100%

Let us have a look at books in Chukchi (Table 6): the peak of directly ideological literature comes in the 1960s and 1970s and corresponds to the decline of school and other books; the lion's share of these books was published by Magadan Publisher. The party policy here was evidently: well, since you insist on publishing books in Chukchi, you will publish what we need. Books published in indigenous languages bear on them the distinct mark of "campaigns" imposed on the publishing policy from Moscow, or perhaps in some cases from regional centres. Two examples of such campaigns can be seen with veterinary and medical books in Chukchi. The first veterinary book appeared in 1952, the peak was in 1957 (five books), then a recession; the last was published in 1964. Neither before that period nor after were there any veterinary books printed. In Nenets, six books of the same kind were published in the 1930s: all six are instructions

to hunters; how to hunt and process pelts of arctic foxes, squirrels, wolves, hares, foxes, and ermines. In the 1950s, in parallel to Chukchi, three veterinary books appear out of nowhere, and then this line is never pursued again.

Table 6. Chukchi books: School aids and politics.

	Political editions		School books	
1930s	4	12%	29	88%
1940s	0	0%	13	100%
1950s	16	25%	47	75%
1960s	17	63%	10	37%
1970s	24	75%	8	25%
1980s	17	53%	15	47%
1990s	1	17%	5	83%
2000s	0	0%	4	100%

A similar pattern can be seen in books on medicine and hygiene. In 1940, the first Chukchi book is published in Leningrad (*Towards a Healthy Life*), then in 1960 a "campaign" broke out: the Magadan Publisher printed between one and two books a year until 1971; the last book (*Alcohol is Poison*) appeared in 1974: evidently, this project was started earlier. Finally, an important feature of the publication program was that some translations from Russian (not necessarily those by political leaders like Stalin or other big bosses, or by famous Russian writers like Pushkin or Maiakovskii) appeared more or less simultaneously in all or most Northern languages: for example, a book by A. Jakobson called *People of the North* was published in 1935 in Koryak, Evenki, Yupik Eskimo, Mansi, Chukchi and others.

Indigenous authors, gender aspect

Work on writing, translating and editing books was very effective in creating an indigenous intelligentsia, and educating people who often became authors of books themselves. In the 1930s, indigenous people (mostly students) were employed as assistants, translators, correctors of texts written by scholars or by Russian authors. In the 1940s and 1950s, individual books authored (or sometimes co-authored) by indigenous people began to appear. With the general decrease of books published in the 1960s, the share of indigenous authors became much more visible: in Yupik, only one book was printed in the 1960s, and it was co-authored by an indigenous and a non-indigenous author; in Khanty, six out of seven books published in the 1960s had indigenous authors. In the 1980s, when the number of books began to grow again, this growth was taking place mostly due to the efforts of indigenous authors: 11 out of 14 Yupik books, 19 out of 40 Chukchi books, and 21 out of 22 Khanty books were written (authored or co-authored) by indigenous people. Worried by the decline of their languages and cultures, anxious to revitalize them, indigenous people seem to have

taken the job into their own hands. On the average, more than 70% of those were women.

The data reviewed here demonstrate several declines in the number of books published throughout the Soviet period and after, and also several upsurges. There was an upsurge in the 1930s, then a decline in 1941-1945, then a sharp increase in the late 1940s-1950s, then a long recession from the late 1950s to the late 1970s, then again an increase in the late 1980s, then a drastic drop of the early 1990s, and then again, a slow increase in the late 1990s and the first years of the 21st century.

State policy, economy and community attitudes

Some of these increases and recessions are relatively easy to explain. It is clear, for instance, why we have gaps during the war years, and after 1990 during the economic crisis in Russia. It is also clear that the increases of the 1930s and 1950s are explained by direct political decisions by the central government. The most interesting and the least clear period is, however, the two and a half decades between the mid-1950s and the late 1970s where we can again see two serious changes of the state policy. Here is how an editor from the "Northern Editions" section of the Prosvescheniya Publisher⁵ recalls these years:

[...] Northern literature was published for some time, but by the time I got a job with the publisher they stopped to publish it. In the early 60s, they ceased to publish it at all: there were only a few titles when I came there, those that already were worked on, they were completing the cycle, and then stopped: it was thought that nobody needed those books, that they were not used, and not needed.

[...] I remember the former director of the publishing house, Bessonov, who told me that he himself, with some representatives of the Ministry [of Education] made a tour of Northern regions, and he saw with his own eyes that these books we did were not called for. They were not used. Nobody was interested in their native languages. They [indigenous people] did not want to learn their native languages, they wanted to learn Russian so that they could study in Russian schools and then enter Russian universities. This is why this decision was made [...] (Vinokurova 2004).

Hence, the decision to stop publishing the books in Yupik and other Indigenous languages of the North was taken. It is not quite clear here where is the horse and where is the cart. I do not have any illusions about the Soviet policy in general and the Soviet language policy in particular. We all know how ruthless and even barbarous the Soviets could be in imposing on the people what they thought right or "good" for the people. I will not give examples here of cruelty of the Soviet policy because they are widely known. Yet, we know that in 1956 Nikita Khrushchev addressed the 20th Party Congress and, among other things, proclaimed a new policy in school education that introduced Russian as the main and often the only language of instruction, and also introduced a system of compulsory boarding schools for indigenous children of the North (Liarskaya 2004). Together with the industrial development of the North, the

⁵ Valentina Vinokurova (b. 1935); interview recorded August 12, 2004.

sharp increase of the non-indigenous population, forceful relocation and amalgamation of indigenous villages, this had a very negative effect on the Northern peoples and their languages.

We have solid grounds to believe that this Mr. Bessonov, the director of the Publishing House my source is referring to, who made a trip to the North and came back convinced that the people there did not need school books in their native languages, and even did not need their languages at all—that this gentleman saw, heard and said what he was supposed to see, hear and say because these were the blueprints prepared by the Party: in full accord with the Bolshevik principle, if the Party says something was true, it meant that it was true. But still: should we totally exclude the possibility that a feed-back circuit of some sort between the Party and the people did exist? Can we be sure that the attitude of the communities in the late 1940s to the early 1950s towards having indigenous languages in the school curricula was unanimously positive? Is it not possible that there were other attitudes in the communities?

We know from our own experience that in the 1970s, when books in Northern indigenous languages were almost not published at all, when indigenous languages were almost totally removed from school curricula, there was a very strong unanimous complaint from indigenous people, and a loud demand to do something about the preservation and revitalization of indigenous languages. This public protest—if one can talk about public protest in the Soviet Union at all—eventually led to changes in language policy of the Soviet state. Here is how Vinokurova recalls this time:

[...] when they resumed, yes, this I remember, it was already in my time. It was in 1969: letters began coming from the regions, not only to us but also to the Ministry, about how important it is [to study indigenous languages at school]. Probably some people also came to work at the Ministry who realized that this was important [...]. And when [Vladimir] Sangi became an adviser to the government, then this all gained momentum: he initiated the issuing of a Party decree, and after the decree everything sped up so that we began to publish 20 books [in indigenous languages] every year (Vinokurova 2004).

I asked her why does she think the policy was changed, and here is her answer:

I do not know for sure how it was but I think the people who lived there understood that this infringes their rights. If they learned their languages at school, they would be like representatives of their people, they could go to study to a higher school [because of special quotas that existed at many universities for Northern people]. If not; who would enroll them? They learned at school from Russian books, they do not speak anything but Russian; why are they Native people? Why should they have privileges? [...] I also think that the intellectual elites in the North had by that time already emerged, those who realized that one should not forget one's native language [...] (Vinokurova 2004).

If one assumes that the policy shift of the late 1970s towards publishing the books in indigenous languages was at least partly caused by changes in the attitudes of the people themselves and was not a totally arbitrary decision made by the Party, then one can also suppose that the previous policy shift of the mid-1950s could also have been at least partly initiated by the negative attitude of some communities—or by some

members of these communities—towards indigenous languages. As Vinokurova continued:

[...] even today, there are parents who say: let them study native languages, but there are others who say: we do not need it. Even today, in spite of what they call growth of ethnic identity, in spite of the Decade of Indigenous People campaign—still, people have different attitudes [...] (Vinokurova 2004).

Discussion

There are two aspects of the process above mentioned: the *policy of the state*, which can be either favorable towards indigenous languages or suppress them (or simply ignore them), and the *attitude of the communities* towards preserving and using the languages. There are, it seems, four logical combinations of these aspects:

- 1) Both the state and the community share concern for, and work towards, preserving indigenous languages. There seems to be one period in Russian history when this happy union was in place: the late 1920s and 1930s—a time when many languages of the North began to develop quickly as standard literary languages.
- 2) The state adopts a favorable policy towards indigenous languages but the communities do not share this attitude and are more or less indifferent to the future of their native tongues; in this case the efforts of the state look somewhat artificial, and the language in question will in all probability quickly move towards disappearance. This was, it seems, the case in Russia in the late 1940s and the early 1950s.
- 3) The state ignores the indigenous languages, but the communities feel very strongly about it and persuade the state to change its policy and to help—by investing money into school, into teaching the teachers, into publishing books. This was the situation in Russia in the 1960s-1970s.
- 4) The state ignores the indigenous languages, and the communities are also not very much interested in preserving them; in this case the language will quickly disappear. Luckily, I cannot find such a period in Russian history of the 20th century.

Efforts by the state, if they are not supported by the community, are doomed to fail. Moreover, in this situation the position of linguists who advocate revival and development of indigenous languages is vulnerable to reproaches like the one I quoted at the beginning of this talk: "a forced education in a non-prestigious language imposed on the people is hardly better than forced Russification" (Alpatov 2002: 200). Likewise, efforts of the community if they are not supported by the state or even opposed by it cannot be effective. In this situation, the state, if it does not change its policy, can be attacked from the other side, and accused of "attempts to lay a foundation for linguacide and genocide" (Neroznak 2002: 7), to use another quotation from the first part of this paper.

If neither the community nor the state are interested in the fate of the indigenous language, its future is, let me repeat, quite clear. I am convinced that the only case when we can effectively fight against language shift is when the intentions of the state (and linguists) and the intentions of the community go hand in hand. This makes our task double hard: not only have we, the linguists, to persuade the government, be it federal or local, that they must spend money and time on supporting indigenous language revitalization programs; but we sometimes have to persuade the communities that they need those programs. Those two waves—ups and downs in the state policy and ups and downs in community attitude—seem almost never to go hand in hand in the Russian history, never to coincide in time. The only exception would be the sad scenario 4 above, when both factors are at a low point and there is no energy in the system that can cause its change from the inside. The other three scenarios are unstable, and are bound to flow into one another. It is difficult to say in which phase of the process Russia is today—hopefully—in transition from scenario 3 to scenario 1, but one can never be sure.

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