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Contact-induced change and attrition: assessing the impact of Russian

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1. Abstract:

The research conducted was part of a larger investigation of the sociolinguistic dynamics of language change and loss in Eurasia and a study of the linguistic processes and effects of this shift and loss. Situating the spread of a single donor language, Russian, across a wide group of typologically and genealogically distinct languages within a framework of language ecologies enables us to examine similarities and differences in linguistic ecologies at macro- and micro-levels. These languages have in common a partially shared history in terms of contact with Russian, by virtue of being part of the Russian (and Soviet) empires, although these histories differ in their particulars. Many of them are in contact with languages other than Russian, but at present shift is primarily unidirectional to Russian. This provides prime testing ground for two interrelated sets of question. The first is the questions involving the social, historical and political specifics of individual language ecologies foster language attrition or retention and what, if any, effect they have on the linguistic outcomes of shift. The second is a focus on the specific morphosyntactic changes that occur to study the relevance of the linguistic structures of the languages undergoing shift, the recipient languages, in an effort to determine the linguistic nature of language change. The data enable us to determine, to a certain extent, what structures are borrowed, the order of borrowing, and to examine differences between contact-induced change with and without language shift. The primary product will be a book focusing on these issues.

2. Research Goals & Activities:

This project examines the linguistic effects of shift to Russian among the different languages of Eurasia that are in long-standing contact with it. It brings together work on

language endangerment, shift and attrition, and research in contact and variation. Investigating the kinds of morphosyntactic changes that occur in language contact, it examines the linguistic processes involved in conjunction with sociolinguistic factors in shift and mechanisms of diffusion. It raises key questions about change in contact situations, asking whether there is predictability to the kinds of changes that occur, the order in which they occur, and the rate at which they occur. The languages under investigation here are all in contact with Russian and have been for centuries. They differ genealogically and typologically, providing an excellent testing ground for studying the mechanisms and processes involved in the changes in contrastive samples. At a macro-level, they have been subject to similar language and education policies, and similar patterns of colonization; while at a micro-level, their language ecologies differ in a great many ways. This provides fertile ground for investigating both linguistic and sociolinguistic factors involved in shift, and in the rate of shift and attrition.

Eurasia is defined here as the vast geopolitical area encompassing the territory of the former Soviet Union, with particular focus here on eastern Eurasia to encompass Siberia, stretching to the far eastern Pacific coast and northern Arctic regions, the region north of Moscow, and to the south in the Caucasus. The exact number of languages spoken in this territory varies depending on how they are counted; the *Ethnologue* cites 103 living languages in the Russian Federation today (Lewis et al. 2013); the *UNESCO Atlas of Endangered Languages* puts the total count at 130 (Moseley 2010); and counts for the number of languages in the Soviet Union vary from 130-190 (Grenoble 2003).

The majority of my time in St. Petersburg was spent working in the libraries and archives to research existing resources and documentation of language shift. The primary goal of this phase of the research was to establish a database of linguistic changes under the influence of Russian. This meant tracking down existing publications, unpublished manuscripts and consulting with specialists. Many of the earlier recordings are as of yet untranscribed and thus not usable at this time. However, increasing interest in language documentation, language loss can be combined with earlier descriptive fieldwork for some sense of language change over the last century or so. The current database includes some pan-Siberian surveys and analyses (Anderson 2006, 2000; Pakendorf 2010) and language examples extracted from research focused on contact as well as from mining

existing descriptions of the languages. A few studies have focused on contact in Eurasia and the former Soviet Union, such as the excellent collections of materials in Jahr & Broch (1996), Vakhtin (2007) and Vardul' & Belikov (1987). At present the database includes the following languages: Aleut on the Commander Islands as well as contact-induced changes (Golovko 2009, Golovko et al. 2009); Baltic Finnic (Pugh 1999); Enets (Helimski 2007, Urmanchieva 2008); Itelmen (Georg & Volodin 1999, Volodin 1994); Izma Komi (Leinonen 2004); Kalmyk (Baranova 2009; Baranova & Say 2009a, 2009b; Say 2009); Karelian (Õispuu 1998); Kazakh (Muhamedova 2009); Ket (Minaeva 2003); Northern Romany (Rusakov 2004); Saami-Russian contacts (Kert 1994a, 1994b, Klaus 1977); Selkup (Kazakevich 2005); and Vod (Agranat 2008); Tundra Yukaghirs (Maslova 2004) and Yupik (Vakhtin 1985, 2013).

I have singled out two language regions of particular interest in the project: language contact in Chukotka (see also De Reuse 1994), due to the high levels of multilingualism here, and because earlier records of this region are available. My own fieldwork on Evenki, a Tungusic language, makes this family of particular interest, all the more so because the entire language family is endangered (Janhunen 2005). For the Tungusic languages as a whole there are a number of sources: (Li 2005, Malchukov 2003), for Nanai (Oskoskaja and Stojnova 2013), and for Sakha and Even contact (Pakendorf 2007, 2013).

Beyond this basic research of gathering existing data on language shift, I was able to consult extensively with specialists at the Institute of Linguistic Research, Russian Academy of Sciences (ILI RAN), my home institution for the duration of my stay. ILI RAN houses linguists who specialize in Eurasian languages to discuss the project as a whole as well as language-specific data. Faculty at the Institute of Northern Peoples at the Herzen State Pedagogical University also provided invaluable assistance. I was also able to meet with linguists at other institutions (St. Petersburg State University, Moscow State University, Russian State University for the Humanities) to discuss my research.

3. Research Findings:

3.1 Overview of language shift in Eurasia

Language loss is occurring at an unprecedented rate since the breakup of the Soviet Union. Discussions with fieldworkers who have deep and recent knowledge of the language ecologies of the region confirm this conclusion; if anything, language shift is even more widespread than previously understood (Kibrik 1992). The Russian language has been in sustained and intimate contact with a very large number of typologically and genealogically different languages for centuries. Pervasive language shift throughout Eurasia provides the opportunity to examine shift in process on a broad scale, precisely because of the large number of languages involved. Ethnic populations in the Russian Federation with less than 50,000 are officially classified as *small-numbered* which is often interpreted as indigenous. For many indigenous inhabitants of Eurasia, Russian is already their first and primary language; only the Nenets (Uralic) shows more than 50% of the population fluent in the ancestral language. (Even a language like Buriat (Mongolic), which has 218,557 speakers according to the 2010 All-Russian Census, is currently shifting to Russian.)

Contact with Russian is long-standing and well-documented historically. The expansion of Russian across Eurasia began in the 15th century; by the 1700s contact with even the most eastern Siberian peoples on Kamchatka was well-established; by the early 1900s, a Russian trading post was founded in the very far northeast in Anadyr, Chukotka (Forsyth 1992). Existing linguistic documentation of Eurasian languages from the beginning of this contact to the present day varies greatly. For a few, we have records dating back to early contact; such is the case of Komi (Uralic) thanks to the efforts of the missionary Stefan of Perm, who developed an orthography for Komi in the second half of the 14th century and translated liturgical texts into the language. For other languages, records before the Soviet period are limited to word lists or non-existent. For some languages we have rich documentation from the late Tsarist to early Soviet periods, such as the study of Chukchi (Chukotko-Kamchatkan) by Bogoras (1904-09, 1913, 1920), or Yukagir by Jochelson (1926). For other languages, documentation and description comes even later, and so the time depth available for analysis varies considerably. For many languages it is challenging to find data on current language shift. Due to a combination of factors, including the push to document endangered languages while they are still spoken and a general linguistic puristic practice of describing the “correct” forms of languages,

examples of language shift are not always fully described or not even recorded. Thus to a certain extent, and for very practical considerations, the sample is dictated by availability.

In order to understand the changes taking place in individual languages, it is important to understand the systems they are changing from. The linguistic landscape of Eurasia is mapped out in this chapter at the level of language families and their overall typological structures. More details of individual languages, included information about numbers of speakers, geographic distribution, and levels of multilingualism, are provided as a reference in the Appendix. The Eurasian linguistic region has been argued to show *areal* effects under conditions of stable multilingualism, including the use of personal pronouns instead of possessive, the relatively large number of cases, and use of evidentials (Anderson 2006). In some regions, such as Sakha/Yakutsk, we find such effects as the spread of a future imperative (Pakendorf 2007) from Evenki. Such areal effects need to be distinguished from shift effects, although this is often not difficult. Convergence in linguistic areas is often found among languages other than Russian, and shift effects show Russian influence.

A close analysis of the results of patterns of shift reveals that the linguistic effects of contact with Russian are replicated time and again in different speaker populations. The changes described in upcoming chapters are indicative of massive language shift and loss, known to be characterized by allomorphic reduction, radical simplification and regularization of certain paradigms; generalization of a single case affix to cover various peripheral case functions; a tendency to eliminate verbal inflectional affixes; a breakdown in agreement rules; and a replacement of synthetic forms by analytic ones or by periphrastic constructions (Campbell & Muntzel 1998; Maher 1991; Schmidt 1985).

3.2 *Shift and language loss*

The project centers on unidirectional shift and subsequent language loss under the impact of Russian. I use the term *attrition* as a general term for language loss that does not necessarily imply *intragenerational loss* (Köpke & Schmidt 2004: 5). The relative scarcity of data of shift in Eurasian languages makes it difficult to determine whether the processes of linguistic loss differ if the loss occurs over the course of an individual's lifetime (due to lack of full acquisition, or loss of the linguistic system due to lack of use)

versus shift from generation to generation. Research on language attrition in other areas suggests that there are differences, and it is wise to be cautious at this stage and not assume that these processes will be the same. The overall lack of detailed longitudinal studies in the Eurasian context presents certain challenges in this regard.

One central question is whether change in attrition differs from change without shift: while some linguists argue that change differs only in terms of the amount and rate of change (e.g. Aikhenvald 2012, 2002; Dorian 1981), others find differences (Sasse 1992; Hutz 2004). The findings presented in this study inform this debate. On the one hand we find similar linguistic changes in the recipient languages, frequently borrowing the same linguistic material and frequently transferring the same linguistic structures (or similarities in MAT and PAT borrowing, using the terminology of e.g. Matras & Sakel 2007). On the other hand, some of the changes differ significantly, not only in frequency and lack of *systematicity* but also in kind. The lack of detailed longitudinal data for intragenerational attrition means we cannot track an individual speaker's changes over time. Rather, this analysis is based on examining change in both real and apparent time, on cross-comparison of speakers (often but not always inter-generational) and with diachronic records of contact effects.

The contact situations under consideration present two sets of processes: the loss of linguistic features due to attrition (Campbell & Muntzel 1998) and the acquisition of Russian linguistic features. These two processes go hand-in-hand but the data show variation in rate of change and in the nature of change across different languages and across speakers of the same heritage language. Some of these differences are accounted for in terms of varying levels of bilingualism, which can be conceptualized as a continuum of fluency. On one end of the continuum are speakers who are fully fluent in the heritage language and less fluent in Russian, while on the other are speakers who are fully fluent in Russian and less fluent in the heritage language; in extreme cases “less fluent” may mean knowing only a few words or phrases of either language. At the same time these speakers with very limited knowledge of the heritage language may have been fully fluent at some point, but have lost their knowledge through lack of use, while others never fully acquired it. The discussion here builds on similar work defining gradations in speaker abilities, or what has been called a semi-speaker continuum (see Campbell &

Muntzel 1998; Sasse 1992a, b). Thus one of the challenges for this study is the very complex dynamics of the speaker populations, and one of its contributions is teasing out these differences to understand their impact on the nature of language loss.

3.3 *Morphosyntactic changes*

The findings discussed here are preliminary as I am still involved in data analysis. I divide the kinds of morphosyntactic changes found under the influence of Russian into three large categories: argument structure, verbal restructuring, and changes in information structure. There are extensive changes in all three areas in all languages in the corpus. At present, broad patterns have emerged; these support some construals of borrowing hierarchies. There is relatively little borrowing of case morphology but widespread borrowing of governance patterns, conjunctions, and clause-combining strategies. The data show little evidence for borrowing of the category of verbal aspect but there is widespread borrowing of the conditional.

The patterns of borrowing that are attested support, in large part, borrowing hierarchies put forth by Matras (2007), and also Stolz & Stolz (1996), Ross (2001). Supporting data come from Northern Romany (Rusakov 2004, Rusakov & Abramov 1999), as well as other Romany varieties (Boretzky 1989, Friedman 1985); Aleut (Golovko 2009), Estonian (Zarodsskaya Itelmen (Volodin 1994), Kalmyk (Baranova & Say 2009a, 2009b, 2009c); Veps (Burlak & Starostin 2001), Enets (Urmanchieva 2008), Nanai (Oskolskaja & Stojnova 2013).

Word order is considered to one area to be especially susceptible to change via contact (Dryer 1992, Matras 2009, Thomason & Kaufman, Thomason 2001a, b; see Heine 2008 for somewhat contrary views). The present study supports the findings that word order changes relatively easily. To the extent that these changes can be documented chronologically, it appears to be one of the first areas to undergo shift.

Perhaps the overall most striking change in all of the languages is shrinkage, i.e., reduced use of morphology, syntax and even the lexicon. It is at times difficult to discern that there are changes in the target language itself as opposed to code-switching with Russian. As a tentative conclusion, it appears that in many cases language attrition is so rapid that Russian does not influence the morphosyntax of the indigenous languages but

rather wholesale replaces it. If this can be proven to be the case, this would be a strong indicator of a difference between contact-induced change with (rapid) shift and stable language contact.

4. Policy Implications and Recommendations:

My study shows that there is massive language shift for all indigenous languages of the former Soviet Union. As stated in my original application, the results of my research directly supported the Arctic Indigenous Language Vitality Initiative (arcticlanguages.com), a project of the Permanent Participants of the Arctic Council. The Arctic Council is a unique organization made up of eight member nation states (Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden and the United States). The Permanent Participants of the Arctic Council are non-voting members who have an advisory role to the Council, and a seat at all meetings. Six official indigenous organizations constitute the Permanent Participants: Aleut International Association; the Arctic Athabaskan Council; the Gwich'in International Council International; the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC); the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON); and the Saami Council.

Members of these indigenous organizations, RAIPON among them, have indicated a strong desire to reverse language shift and to revitalize their languages. My study shows significant language shift for all indigenous languages within the Russian Federation. To revitalize them, policies are needed to support and foster multilingualism, and policies about the national and regional levels for education programs that promote multilingualism and awareness of the importance of language to cultural and mental well-being. The findings further suggest the need for policy measures to create (and fund) new L2 language materials and for new teacher-training opportunities, and for creating new methodologies to teach older L2 language learners (beyond primary school age). Current materials and methodologies are aimed at children who are fluent speakers of the indigenous languages; the research indicates that very few such speakers are to be found in Russia today.

5. Co-Curricular Activities:

While in Russia, I gave seminar presentations at ILI RAN in St. Petersburg (in April) and at Moscow State University (in March). I attended all workshops and seminars that were held at ILI RAN for the duration of my stay there. I attended the XLIII International Conference on Philological Sciences at Saint Petersburg State University (11-15 March 2014), and met individually with participants, in particular with scholars from Germany and faculty at SPb State University, who are collaborating in projects on the use and structure of spoken Russian. In addition, I met with the group engaged in the project *Odin rechevoj den'* [One day of speech] on a regular basis, in particular with Professors T. Ju. Sherstinova, E. Markasova, N. V. Bogdanova-Beglarian and their students.

During my three month stay I was based in Saint Petersburg but spent 10 days in Moscow, participating in linguistic events at a variety of venues: Moscow State University, Russian State University for the Humanities, the V. V. Vinogradov Institute of the Russian Language of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and the National Research University Higher School of Economics. Events included lectures, seminars and conferences and a book presentation, all enabling me to engage with a wide group of scholars in Moscow.

6. Conclusions:

Conclusions are summarized more thoroughly in Section 3, Research Findings. Here I focus on some of the broader implications of my work. Specifically, the study indicates widespread language shift in parts of the former Soviet Union and relatively sparse research on the causes of such shift at local levels. There is little to no study of social networks, how language change spreads at the community level, and

Language ecologies have important implications for linguistic innovation and the spread of morphosyntactic change and language loss. I have hoped to be able to analyze the variables involved in facilitating loss versus maintenance. The research to date has indicated gaps in our present knowledge of social networks in Russia and their role in language shift versus maintenance, and in a general lack of data on sociolinguistic variation. Although there are records of regional variation in Russian, there is little to no

documentation of variation in shift to Russian, nor is there documentation of sociolinguistic variation in Eurasian indigenous languages. These are prime topics for future research. My hope is that my present work will lay the foundation for this important research.

7. Plans for Future Research Agenda/ Presentations and Publications:

The results of this research will be published in a book on the topic of language contact in Eurasia. Thanks to the funding, the writing is well underway In addition, I plan a series of presentations on the subject matter. I am scheduled to give a talk at Northeastern Illinois University this fall and also plan to discuss the work in workshop at my home university. I intend to present at venues focused on Slavic studies (such as the American Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies, (ASEEES), the annual meeting of the Slavic Linguistics Society) and to general linguists at conferences with a broader audience, as well as specialized conferences with an interest in language contact and shift. I have been asked to return to present findings of my research in Russia

Some new research began as a result of my stay in Russia. I have begun a study of Evenki intonation with my colleague N. Ja. Bulatova, a linguist at ILI RAN and a native speaker of Evenki. During my stay in St. Petersburg, she spent time in Siberia recording Evenki conversations. Together we transcribed a number of these and began an analysis of intonation using Praat software. The materials require further analysis before we are ready to publish our results but there is a good foundation for the first ever instrumental study of basic Evenki intonation and intonation in discourse. Dr. Bulatova and I plan to publish a series of articles on Evenki intonation and conversational structure; this latter project may involve more researchers at ILI RAN who have expressed interest in the project. We are also preparing some recordings of Evenki conversation for archiving since this language is highly endangered and, to the best of our knowledge, there have been no studies of spontaneous conversation in the language.

My stay at ILI RAN resulted in some plans for future collaborations with colleagues in the Institute. These are first, a plan to apply for funding from the US National Science Foundation to support fieldwork with A. Pevnov on Evenki and with E. Golovko and other colleagues in Chukotka and, second, plans to apply for a grant from to support seminars, faculty and student collaborations between the University of Chicago and ILI RAN.

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