

URALIC LANGUAGES OF THE YAMALO-NENETS AUTONOMOUS DISTRICT: A CHALLENGING CASE OF LANGUAGE CONTACT

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Our talk deals with the contacts between four Uralic languages (Nenets, Khanty, Selkup, Komi) in the Yamalo-Nenets autonomous area. The speakers of Nenets, Khanty and Selkup have been interacting for many centuries, and in the first quarter of the XIX century this contact situation became even more complicated due to a vast migration of Izhma Komi population (see [Povod 2006] for historical details). This linguistic area has not been studied in much detail yet, apart from some rather random lists of loanwords in traditional descriptions. However, its study seems quite challenging for areal linguistics and the typology of contact-induced change due to its historical and sociolinguistic heterogeneity combined with close genetic relations between the four languages concerned.

The data have been collected primarily in field. The fieldwork included both elicitation and text recording. In total more than 50 villages were visited in 2006–2017. The information available in the existing dictionaries, as well as some archival materials has also been taken into account. For each local idiom we collected a wordlist including 1500-3500 items from all the main semantic domains, with about 300 lexical units (also representing different domains) studied in detail in each village for their semantics, combinability, cultural connotations etc. Some grammatical issues were studied basing on both our own field data and on the existing texts and descriptions.

First, we will discuss the sociolinguistic situation in the region concerned, focusing on the main contact areas and on the sociolinguistic status of each language and linking these data to the language changes we can observe or trace back (see, among others, [Curnow 2001; Thomason 2001: 70–71] for some theoretical background). Thus, Selkup is now more “detached” from the other languages (however it maintains some contact with Tundra Nenets, Forest Nenets, and Vakh Khanty). Komi speakers live together with Khanty and/or Nenets speakers in different parts of the area, and the sociolinguistic position of Komi varies to a great extent depending on number of speakers in a particular village, maintenance of reindeer herding, contact with other parts of the Komi diaspora etc. In general, Nenets has the strongest position in this region, which results in its considerable influence on other languages, whereas Komi, being spoken by “newcomers”, is the most liable to acquire various kinds of borrowings.

Second, we will analyze the processes which can be at least hypothesized as the results of contact-induced change. Apart from lexical borrowing (see e. g. Nenets loanwords in Khanty and Komi referring to reindeer herding, parts of traditional dwelling places etc.), these cases include pattern borrowing, when one language copies polysemy patterns or the structure of a semantic domain from another one. Thus, Khanty dialects consistently oppose kinship terms (e. g. for grandmother and grandfather) depending on the maternal vs. parental line, while in the Obdorsk dialect influenced by Nenets this opposition disappeared probably following the Nenets pattern. Again, in Obdorsk Khanty a lexeme *wōl'ək* ‘slippery’, which describes all or most types of slippery surfaces across the other Western dialects, can only refer to icy bearing surfaces (e. g. to a road covered with ice) – similarly to Nenets *salət'q* ‘slippery’. Smooth (perceived by touch) and level (visually perceived) surfaces are both described as *pajli* in Obdorsk Khanty (cf. Nenets *salmuy*° with the same polysemy), while in the other Western dialects its scope is limited to visually perceived surfaces (which is rather transparent taking into account that *pajli* is derived from a noun *paj* ‘bump, heap’

referring to various visually evaluated entities). An interesting example where linguistic and cultural processes interact is provided by Komi animal terms: they include some taboos and euphemisms in the local idioms being in contact with Nenets, similarly to Nenets polysemy patterns and cultural practices.

In our talk we will compare our findings with the typological patterns of lexical borrowing found in [Haspelmath, Tadmor (eds.) 2009] and in WOLD. We will also provide some information on how the four languages concerned interact in grammar (e. g. in possessive constructions, comparative and some other types of constructions).

References

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