

Selkup-Ket and Selkup-Evenki contacts in the framework of the present-day linguistic situation in the area of the Middle Yenisei and the Upper and Middle Taz

The paper presents some aspects and consequences of linguistic and cultural contacts of the Northern Selkups with the Kets and the Western Evenkis. These contacts have quite a long history: over three centuries, as far as the Selkup-Evenki contacts concerns (Tugolukov 1985) and over seventeen centuries, as far as the Selkup-Ket contacts concerns, the latter are supposed to start in the South of Siberia well before the Selkups and the Kets moved to their present-day position (Dybo 2005). Since the XVIIth century all the three peoples also have been contacting with the Russians, though up to the XXth century these contacts were mostly sporadic in the area, especially in the Taz basin. Starting from the mid-1920s they were getting regular, and since the 1950s have been growing more and more intense. At present all the Selkups, Kets and Evenkis use Russian as the main means of communication both at home and in the community life. Even most of elderly people speak much more Russian than Selkup, Ket, or Evenki to-day. Children able to speak their ancestral language are scares among the Selkups and Evenkis and absolutely absent among the Kets.

The Selkup-Evenki contacts were especially intense in two zones – in the North (the village of Soverechka and the area of the Soviet Lakes) and in the South (the villages of Ratta and Tolka at the upper flow of the Taz). In the Northern zone the bulk of the population is built by the Evenkis, speakers of the Ilimpiya dialect, who partly assimilated the local Selcup descendants from the Middle-Taz. The Selkups who reside in Sovrehka and still preserve their ancestral language and ethnicity can all speak Evenki (and of course Russian). In the Southern zone the local Selkups, speakers of the Upper-Taz dialect, have totally assimilated a group of the Sym Evenkis, which lived side by side with them for about two centuries. The assimilating process started about a century ago and was completed about a decade ago, so that no speaker of Sym Evenki is left here. Accounts of the situation in the community done at the end of the 1920s (Skalon 1930) and our own field materials collected in 1971, 1996 and 2002 allow to trace the process of the assimilation step by step.

The Selkup-Ket contacts have always been very close: for centuries Selkups and Kets were allies and marriage partners. Ket ancestors can be found by not a few Selkups at the Taz (Ratta, Tolka, Krasnoselkup) and at the Turukhan (Farkovo). Selkup ancestors have many Kets at the Yenisei (Baklanikha, Surgutikha), the Yelogui (Kellog) and Munduiskoye Lake (Maduika). Quite recently in Baklanikha, Surgutikha and to some extend in Kellog Ket-Selkup-Russian trilingualism was rather widely spread in the elder generation.

Finally we suppose to discuss the role of the total bilingualism of Selkup, Ket, and Evenki speakers in the structural changes of each particular language, which can be traced comparing linguistic materials recorded in different periods within the last century. Though there is no doubt that the intensive contacts with each other and with Russian contributed to these changes, the contacts could probably just speed up the inner processes slowly developing in the language itself.

References

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