



Title	On Some Features of Nivkh and Uilta (in Connection with Prospects of Russian-Japanese Collaboration)
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Citation	津曲敏郎編 = Toshiro Tsumagari ed., 113-125
Issue Date	2009-03-08
Doc URL	http://hdl.handle.net/2115/38305
Type	proceedings
Note	北大文学研究科北方研究教育センター公開シンポジウム「サハリンの言語世界」. 平成20年9月6日. 札幌市
File Information	12Pevnov.pdf



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On Some Features of Nivkh and Uilta (in Connection with Prospects of Russian-Japanese Collaboration)¹

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My aim is to outline some problems and prospects of the study of two endangered languages of Sakhalin (namely Nivkh and Uilta which was previously called Orok). I believe that collaboration of Russian and Japanese linguists can substantially contribute to solution to many problems including those mentioned below.

I

At present four languages of indigenous peoples are still spoken in Sakhalin: Nivkh (Paleoasiatic, or else Paleosiberian), Uilta, Evenki, and Nanai (all of them belong to the Manchu-Tungusic language family). The most endangered one is Uilta which is undoubtedly in the process of gradual and inevitable extinction. I know from my own experience (Sept. 2008, Nogliki, Val in the North of Sakhalin) that there are very few people (10-15?) who not only remember a certain amount of Uilta words and phrases but hopefully are also able to narrate, to produce more or less simple Uilta texts.

The situation is relatively better with the speakers of **Nivkh**, but the threat of language extinction is actual in this case, too. Luckily nowadays it is quite possible to record Nivkh texts of a rather high quality. In September 2008 I had a splendid opportunity to work with Valentina Nikolajevna Sačgun. She lives in Katangli near Nogliki and is a perfect speaker of Sakhalin Nivkh (Tym' dialect or maybe subdialect). The most interesting and valuable thing is that in the 70–80-s Valentina Nikolajevna worked in Leningrad with Je. A. Krejnovič.

The Nivkh language in Sakhalin is presented in all its principal dialect varieties: the (East) Sakhalin Nivkh idiom, the Amur Nivkh idiom, and the Schmidt peninsula idiom, which can be regarded, according to Je. A. Krejnovič, as a mixed one (the Sakhalin Nivkh idiom + the Amur Nivkh idiom). Je. A. Krejnovič pointed out that previously there was probably one single Nivkh dialect in Sakhalin. Later on some groups of Nivkhs migrated from the Amur region to the north-west of Sakhalin where

¹ The work on this article was partly supported by the Russian Foundation for Humanities (project “Rare and unique features of the endangered languages of the Russian Federation”, № 08-04-00167a).

they separated Nivkhs inhabiting Schmidt peninsula from other Sakhalin Nivkhs and it caused the formation of a mixed dialect (the Schmidt peninsula dialect) [Крейнович 1979: 296].

In my opinion, the Nivkh language cannot be young because **any genetically isolated language** (and Nivkh is undoubtedly one of them) **must be old or even very old** – if not, it would inevitably have distant or close relatives. It also refers to languages which represent one-language branch within a language family, e.g. Greek, Armenian, Albanian; Chuvash, Yakut; Manchu – all of them are relatively isolated and for that reason they are older or much older than their non-isolated relatives. In other words, young languages do not exist without close genetic relationship to other languages; at the same time old and very old languages are isolated either absolutely or relatively (in the framework of a language family). From that point of view Nivkh, Ainu, Japanese, and Korean are old or extremely old and Uilta, Nanai, Ulch(a), Oroch, Negidal are comparatively young. By the way, the antiquity of Chinese is illusive – actually the Chinese “dialects” are more or less young languages. Interestingly all these named above genetically isolated languages are not continental – they are to a different degree coastal or even insular. As to continental genetically isolated languages they are usually situated either in mountainous areas or in any other difficult of access region (e.g. in Northern Siberia).

One of the most complicated problems of the Nivkh grammar is incorporation.

Incorporation is a kind of a special grammatical technique which enables a word to function as a morpheme. In polysynthetic languages situation is different: they possess not a few affixes with lexical meaning and the main thing is that these affixes can never be used as words.

Firstly, if we acknowledge the existence of incorporation in Nivkh (at present or in the past), we must say that there are (were) two variants of incorporation in this language: noun incorporation (attribute + noun) and verbal incorporation (object + verb). It is very important that in both cases incorporation (or so to speak incorporation) is accompanied by alternation of the initial consonant of the main component: *k'u*² “arrow” – *vyt'-xu* “iron arrow”; *t'o-ɾad* “to fry fish” – *t'us-t'ad* “to fry meat”; alternation of that kind is characteristic of some affixes, which is regarded to be a confirmation of existence of incorporation in Nivkh.

² All examples in this article (except Ainu ones) are uniformly transliterated: palatalization is marked by ', aspiration by ʰ, *r* denotes voiceless *r*; *χ*, *ʁ*, *q*, and *ǵ* denote uvular sounds (voiceless fricative, voiced fricative, voiceless obstruent, and voiced obstruent correspondingly), *y* is used for transliteration of the Russian letter *yl*.

Secondly, if we accept the idea of incorporation in Nivkh (even in the past), we may draw the following conclusions.

Any incorporated word, which functions as a morpheme, is attached to the governing unit exclusively in preposition because all subordinate units in Nivkh are never used in postposition. The Nivkh language has a number of prefixes³, which were mostly derived from personal pronouns used “incorporatingly” (**n’i-dyf* → *n’ryf* “my house” where *n’i(-)* means “I”; **n’i-rod*’ → *n’rod*’ “(he) helped me”). It is logical to say that at least in the Nivkh language **prefixation and incorporation were closely connected with each other in the sense that incorporation of pronouns generated prefixes** (but the opposite is not true: prefixation does not lead to incorporation). And vice versa: exclusive suffixation is probably incompatible with incorporation.

V. Z. Panfilov denied incorporation in Nivkh [Панфилов 1954; Панфилов 1958; Панфилов 1960]; Je. A. Krejnovič, on the contrary, advocated this idea [Крейнович 1958; Крейнович 1966]. In recent years various aspects of this problem attracted attention of linguists [Kaneko 2003; Mattissen 2003].

Je. A. Krejnovič wrote that “the last member of the comitative group, which serves as the direct object, is incorporated by the transitive verb”: *Harot n’orχ tyvyr, en’yo k’ysko pud’yo k’uyo-bora, rykr...* “Afterwards (he) entered a *n’o* (special wooden construction for keeping belongings and for living in summer), took ski(s), ski poles, bows, arrows and brought (them) in ...” [Крейнович 1979: 303]. This example contradicts the idea of incorporation for two reasons: 1. because a comitative group (*en’yo k’ysko pud’yo k’uyo*) must be incorporated entirely, not partly; 2. because all incorporated elements must be free of any inflexional affixation (cf. “classical” incorporation in Chukchi).

In my opinion, the Nivkh language probably could use incorporation in more or less remote past. At present incorporation in Nivkh is deprived of its system character. I suppose that “incorporation heritage” of Nivkh can be illustrated by the fact that in some cases there is **no distinction between direct and indirect object** in this language.

V. N. Savel’jeva pointed out that in Nivkh there exists “a comparatively small group of words” (verbs) which are combined with substantives denoting in particular indirect object (the substantives are in nominative case): *rod*’ “to help somebody”, *imyd*’ “to give somebody”, *xezd*’ “to tell somebody”, *fynd*’ “to throw at somebody”, *xud*’ “to be (inanimate) in something”, *fid*’ “to be (animate) somewhere”, *jyud*’ “to

³ Possessive prefixes (personal and reflexive), objective prefixes (personal and reflexive); there is also a prefix with reciprocal meaning.

enter, to go into something, to get somewhere”, *markt*’ “to pour into something”, *sid*’ “to put somewhere” and so on [Савельева 1954: 243-244].

Here are some examples (the absence of reference means quotation from [Нивхско-русский словарь 1970]):

1. *mu sid*’ “to put, to place into a **boat**”;
2. *vo fid*’ “to be in a **village**, to live in a village”;
3. *N’-xy t’as k’ud?* – *Waqi mi xud* “**Where** is my axe? – In the **chest** (box) (literally: “chest inside”)” (my own recordings; V. N. Sačgun, Nogliki, 2008);
4. *Imy oyla ytik yvd*’ “Their child is with the **granny**, is at granny’s place”;
5. *mif t’ivd*’ “to sit on the **ground**” (it is impossible to imagine that the word meaning “to sit” is transitive; nevertheless, Je. A. Krejnovič defines such verbs as “transitive verbs denoting place of action” [Крейнович 1979: 311]) and gives following examples: *irpnt* “to sit on something”, *hus’t’ivnt* “on-this-place-sat down” [Крейнович 1979: 311];
6. *nyx utid*’ “to put into a **cage**”;
7. *If p’oyla k’ezd*’ “He is anxious about **his son**”;
8. *N’-xojŋaw-ğawr-ja!* “Don’t laugh at **me!**” (my own recordings; V. N. Sačgun, Nogliki, 2008);
9. *t’at’f ymiynyd*’ “to stick in a **swamp**”;
10. *p’aχ tyurd*’ “to look into a **window**”;
11. *N’i t’yŋ kimd*’ “I gave (to) **you** (pl.)” [Крейнович 1934: 209];
12. *Teŋi t’esq uyd*’ “A hunchback salmon was caught in a **net**” [Ibid.];
13. *Oyla paχkir t’ayr p’yn’d*’ “A boy threw a stone at a **chipmunk**” [Ibid.];
14. *ŋiv kod*’ “**heart** aches” (alternation both at the end of the first component and in the beginning of the second one; such a double alternation was mentioned by Je. A. Krejnovič [Крейнович 1979: 299]); elicitation: *N’i ŋiw kod* “My heart aches” (I heart aches) but God knows why *N’ux t’oŋr qod* “I have a headache” (I-LOC.ABL head aches) (V. N. Sačgun, Nogliki, 2008);
15. *Jaŋ milk reyɖ* “He is driven mad by **devil**, he is mad” (my own recordings; V. N. Sačgun, Nogliki, 2008); in this example the word *milk* “devil” is a strange object resembling subject.

Rather peculiar are phrases with two formally identical objects – they have no case markers and the only difference between them is their position (an analogue of the direct object goes first and an analogue of the indirect one follows it⁴):

⁴ The languages of so called active typology reveal difference between “the nearest object” and “the distant object” [Климов 1977: 316].

16. *Pityy mu sija!* “Put the **book** into the **boat**!”;
17. *T’ax vyn’ markt’* “To pour **water** into a **kettle**”;
18. *Papak oyla k’imd’* “A **toy** was given (presented) to a **child**” (this sentence is quoted in transliteration from [Савельева 1954: 243]);
19. *Ymyk kuva nux t’yd’* “Mother **threaded** a **needle**” (this sentence and the four following ones are quoted in transliteration from [Панфилов 1965: 46]);
20. *Ymyk karandas p’oyla k’imd’* “Mother gave a **pencil** to **her child**”;
21. *N’i vyt’ huxt ayd’* “I sewed **metal decorations** on a **garment**”;
22. *If t’o n’yy asqamyyt’* “He took (all) the **fish** from **us**”;
23. *T’onyynivx k’e togo xrod’* “A fisherman hung a **net** on a **fence**”.

Something similar is observed in Ainu: “Some verbs, ditransitive verbs, take two objects. There is no special form or structure that can be called dative, and direct and indirect objects are not morphologically distinguished” [Tamura 2000: 42]. The only difference from Nivkh we see in word order, i.e. in Ainu the word which is translated into European languages and into Japanese as a direct object is situated directly before the verb:

cáca weysisam icen kore
 elder be-poor-Japanese money give

‘The elderly man gave the poor Japanese some money.’ [Tamura 2000: 42]

Cf. the Nivkh sentence with the contrary word order:

Ymyk karandas p’oyla k’imd’ “Mother gave a **pencil** to **her child**”.

Nivkh resembles Ainu not only in this respect. Ainu lacks (like Nivkh) accusative and genitive case (Ainu has no cases at all: “Nouns do not decline for gender, number, or case” [Tamura 2000: 81]). The Ainu language is characteristic of verbs denoting qualities (cf. *poro* “to be big, to become big”), it has an opposition of inclusive and exclusive forms, this language has different aspect forms [Tamura 2000: 216-218] and lacks the category of tense [Tamura 2000: 36] (in Nivkh the future tense is opposed to the non-future tense)... As we see, Nivkh and Ainu have some interesting grammatical similarities.

My attention was attracted by what V. Z. Panfilov called “transitive-intransitive verbs” («переходно-непереходные глаголы») [Панфилов 1965: 51]:

N’rymk kyld’ (pild’) “My hands are long (big)” (cf. *If tymk yld’ (vild’)* “He is long-handed (big-handed)”). In my view, constructions like these resemble what one can observe in Japanese: *Kono neko-wa sippo-ga nagai* “This cat has a long tail (this cat is long-tailed)”.

Apparently the difference between *N'rymk kyld'* “My hands are long” and *If tymk γyld'* “He is long-handed” consists in so called actual division of the sentence (information structure of the sentence). In the first case (*N'rymk kyld'*) the word *n'rymk* “my hand” expresses the theme (topic) and the word *kyld'* expresses the rheme (comment) of the sentence, while the second case (*If tymk γyld'*) represents quite a different actual division: the word *if* “he” expresses the theme but the collocation *tymk γyld'* expresses the rheme of the sentence.

Interestingly in constructions like *If tymk γyld'* the dependent element may be not only noun but verb; V. Z. Panfilov gives following examples: *If ny urd'* “He acts well (He is good at acting)”, *Hy ġan ve arkid'* “This dog runs slowly (This dog is “slow at running”)” [Панфилов 1965: 31 (footnote 40)].

All the above mentioned Nivkh examples resemble what is characteristic of incorporation in Chukchi (I mean direct and indirect objects, which are also indistinguishable). Here are some examples borrowed from [Скорик 1977: 238]:

t-y-val'a-mna-rkyn “(I) knife-sharpen” (I sharpen (a, the) knife);
myt-qepl-uvičvet-y-rkyn “(we) ball-play” (We play ball) ;
t-yinn-y-tke-rkyn “(I) fish-smell” (I give out a smell of fish) ;
t-gytka-y-rkypl-yn “(I) foot-struck-(him)” (I struck him with my foot);
ty-gytg-y-lqyt-yrkyn “(I) lake-go” (I go to (a, the) lake).

The Uilta language and in the first place its historical phonetics has also some rare or maybe even unique features.

One such inexplicable peculiarity is that this language underwent some time ago a regular **depalatalization**, e.g.:

duu (*døø* in [Ikegami 1997: 48]) “two” < **d'uer*;
namauli “warm” < **n'ama-*;
taagda duku “white house” < **t'aagd'a d'uku* < **t'aagd'ã d'uuyu* < **t'aagd'an d'uuy*.

Such a depalatalization is by no means a positional one and for that reason it deserves great attention.

At least two similar cases we can find in Nanai: *nasal* “eye, eyes” (< **n'a-sal* < **ja-sal*) and *nai* “man” (< **nari* < **n'ari*), which in Uilta is represented as *nari* “man”.

Strangely enough the depalatalization in Uilta is not quite regular, cf.:

d'akpu “eight” (not **dakpu*);

d'oon “ten” (not **doon*);
d'olo “stone, rock” (not **dolo*).

However, such cases are rare.

One more phonetic peculiarity of Uilta is historical **consonant gemination** which in many cases can not be explained as total progressive or regressive assimilation (equalization). Examples:

itte- “to see” < **it't'e-* < **it'e-*;
mamaat't'a “old woman” < **mamaat'a* < **mamat'aan*;
dallau “dog food” < **dalawun*;
illau “ritual offering in the form of a wooden staff with attached wood shavings” < **ilawun*;
enne “mum, mummy, mother” < **en'ee*?
amma “pa, papa, father” < **amaa*?
baanikka “tin” < rus. *банка*.

Bu naaŋupu d'ilillu ŋaalallu begd'illu bejellu undekkelé goropt'innéé “Our Earth has head, hands, legs, body (– that’s what our) ancestors said (say)” but at the same time *iktelu ana* “teethless” (literally “with tooth without”). This phrase as a piece of folklore text was recorded from Je. A. Bibikova in September 2008 in Nogliki.

Consonant gemination has a different explanation in the following examples:

atta “back” < **at't'a(n)* < **at'ka(n)* < **arka(n)* (this word was borrowed in ancient times by Tungusic languages from a Turkic source, cf. Tatar *arqa* “back”);
sutta “fang, tusk” < **sut't'a* < **sut'ka* < **surka* (cf. Evenki *surka* ~ *hurka* id.).
 At the same time the Uilta word *ute* “door” includes a short consonant despite quite a similar way of historical transformations: *ute* < *ut'e* < *urke* (cf. Evenki *urke*, Ulch(a), Manchu *ut'e* id.).

Long consonants in Uilta are not subject to segmentation, i.e. they cannot belong to different syllables and to different morphemes (this is not the case, for example, in Negidal).

Another strange thing is that unlike other Manchu-Tungusic languages Uilta developed complicated **morphonology** in the nominal and in the verbal system. As a result this language considerably deviated from the ideal agglutinative type and fusion became quite a common process:

naa “land, soil, earth” (nominative case) – *naawa* (accusative); this is a classical case of agglutination;
sele “iron, metal” (nominative case) – *sellee* (accusative);
nari “man” (nominative case) – *narrée* (accusative);
namu “sea” (nominative case) – *nammoo* (accusative);
nakku “hen, cock” (nominative case) – *nakkoo* (accusative);
lot’oo “fishhook” (nominative case) – *lot’okkoo* (accusative);
nalmakta “mosquito” (nominative case) – *nalmaktaa* (accusative);
naawu “widow” (nominative case) – *naawumba* (accusative);
paaxa “liver” (nominative case) – *paagba, paaxxaa* (accusative);
aand’ée “right (not left)” (nominative case) – *aand’éepe* (accusative).

Something similar occurs with the form of the present participle, e.g.:

ηene- “to go” – *ηennée*;
ure- “to grow” – *urrée*;
ite- “to see” – *it’t’ée* (positional palatalization: **ittée* > *it’t’ée*);
sori- “to fight” – *sorrii*.

Some **morphological features** of Uilta look very surprising in comparison with its continental relatives. Suffice it to say that this language created possibly out of its own Manchu-Tungusic material new forms with **irrealis** semantics. Interestingly most of irrealis forms were substituted for newly constructed ones (all but one are characteristic exclusively of the Uilta language):

1. The future tense (*waarilani* (present participle + *-la-* of unknown origin + personal affix) “he will kill”, *ηenelini* (verbal stem + *-li-* of unknown origin + personal affix) “he will go”; the difference between the two future forms is unclear to me; by the way, the latter apparently lacks in [Петрова 1967]); an analogous form expressing the future tense is used in Ulch(a), e.g.: *buurilembi* “(I) shall give” [Сунник 1985: 46];
2. The subjunctive mood (*méokt’alléélaxambi* (present participle + *-la-* of unknown origin + marker of the past participle + personal affix) “(I) would shoot, (I) would fire” [Петрова 1967: 107]);
3. Some imperative forms, specifically 1 Sg., 3 Sg., and 3 Pl. (*ηennéete!* (present participle + *-te*) “let me go!”, *sind’éeello!* (present participle + *-llo* of unknown origin) “let him come!”, *sind’éeல்லol* “let them come!”; I recorded the forms *sind’éeello* and *sind’éeல்லol* from Je. A. Bibikova in Nogliki in September 2008,

it is worth saying that Je. A. Bibikova preferred forms with a single *l*, e.g.: *keerréelo!* “let him catch fish with a seine (sweep-net)!”);

4. Probabilitiv form (*ɣennééliwi* (present participle + *-li-* of unknown origin + personal affix) “maybe I shall go”); this form can be enlarged with the help of the particle *-taani ~ teeni*: *ɣennééliwi-teeni*.

It deserves to be noted that almost all these forms with irrealis semantics are derived from the present participle⁵; the only exception is the alternative form of the future tense such as *ɣenelini* “he will go”; the affix *-li-*, however, can be attached not only to the stem (*ɣene-li-ni*) but also to the marker of the present participle, the result of this attachment is the probabilitiv form (*ɣennééliwi* “maybe I shall go”).

It looks strange that very close genetic relationship between Uilta and Ulch(a) does not contradict the fact that the verbal systems in both languages substantially differ from one another in material respect (i.e. not semantically). In other words, Uilta transformed its verb predominantly in material respect, i.e. it substituted some inherited affixes for newly created ones (first of all, it refers to tense and mood). The situation is different in the nominal sphere. Nevertheless, we find there a number of innovations, too. I would like to give just one example: unlike the rest of the Manchu-Tungusic languages, Uilta expresses with the help of the affix *-du* two meanings which seem to be hardly compatible: locative and ablative. I am quite certain about the origin of that innovation – the same semantics has the Nivkh case marker *-(u)x*.

On the whole Uilta in comparison with most of the Manchu-Tungusic languages is rich in innovations on all levels. It is necessary to stress that for the time being the greater part of phonological, morphological and lexical innovations are inexplicable. For example, who knows why depalatalization occurred or why almost all the forms with irrealis meaning were substituted for newly constructed ones?

Lexical innovations in Uilta are rather numerous and enigmatic. I will give some examples, which for the most part reflect idiolects of Je. A. Bibikova (Nogkiki, Northern Sakhalin) and I. A. Fedjajeva (Val, Northern Sakhalin); the materials were collected by myself in September 2008:

god'i “neck” (in my view, it is a typical borrowing, cf. Nivkh *q'os* “neck”);

xura “nose”;

xoppokto “eyebrow”;

the Southern Uilta replaced the ancient word for tooth by the word *kəɾəktə* of unknown origin but with the Tungusic derivational affix *-ktə* (the word is quoted

⁵ The prototype affix *-ri* is now used when the stem of the present participle ends in a long vowel (e.g. *saa-ri-ni* “(he) knows”).

in transcription used in [Ikegami 1997: 107]); by the way, in Northern Uilta the word for tooth (*ikte*, cf. Ulch(a) *ikte*) is also not genuine – it was borrowed from Evenki (*iikte*);

gééda “one” (it is supposed to be historically connected with e.g. Evenki *géé* “one of two”; in fact, it is doubtful);

saa? “where?” (I would suggest comparison with the Amur (!) Nivkh *rag* “where?”);

ηojokko “egg” (< Nivkh *ηojeq* “egg”);

un’iyeri “star” (< Nivkh *un’yr* “star”);

eure “voice” (it replaced *d’ilda* (< **dild’a* < **dilgan*) which now means “sound”);

kita “needle” (*xulme* “needle” is not forgotten);

tamna ~ *tamnaska* “smoke” (*tamna* also means “mist, fog”, the original word for smoke (*saŋna*) means “tobacco”);

belu “ice” (the original word for ice (*duye* (*duwe*?)) has now a different meaning (“floating of ice”), in Ulch(a) *belu* means “ice-crust ground”);

pajikta “grass” (originally “inner sole made of dried grass”, in Southern Uilta the word for grass is *orokto*, which originally meant “dry grass, hay”);

gééd’i “green” (in Ulch(a) *géédi* means “blue; discoloured” [Сунник 1985: 183]);

soogdo “blue” (originally it meant “yellow”; Nivkh, unlike many Asian languages, has different words for blue and green – maybe it influenced Uilta and Ulch(a) in this respect);

n’ogda (*n’oogda?* *n’oogdo?*) “yellow” (we see that *soogdo* “blue” and *n’ogda* “yellow” could have exchanged their meanings: “blue” (and probably also “green”) → “yellow” and vice versa);

isinda- “to come” (< **isi-nda-* “to reach, to arrive”, this verb replaced the original **d’i-* < **di-* “to come”).

In Uilta there are not a few words of absolutely unclear origin, here are some examples:

saadaj “great bilberry, bog whortleberry; lat.: *Vaccinium uliginosum*”;

poo “place”;

iimo (Northern Uilta) ~ *iijo* (Southern Uilta) “young larch”;

depeine “crooked larch”, “sea larch”;

doro “the North”;

doorima “path”;

nalduma “(Hucho) taimen; lat.: *Hucho*, *Hucho perryi*”;

taldaa “the middle”;

dosobo ~ *dosobu* (in [Ikegami 1997: 48] *dosobuwa*) “hook for hanging a cauldron etc. over the fire”;
ipke “fire, bonfire”;
isu- “come back, return”;
kaapa- “climb, ascend”.

It seems to me quite natural that lexical, phonetic and grammatical **deviations** of that kind are predominantly observed in **marginal representatives of language families**. As regards Manchu-Tungusic languages, these are Uilta and to a lesser degree Even and Solon. Generally speaking, morphonology, unusual sound-change, morphological substitutions have a tendency to be developed in geographically marginal languages of genetic units, e.g. in the Balto-Finnic languages and especially in Lappish (Saami), in the Samoyedic languages; in the Celtic languages; in Yakut.

II

The first successful attempt of Russian-Japanese linguistic collaboration in Sakhalin took place in 1990-1992 (title of the project: “Research on the Languages of Minorities in Sakhalin – Ainu, Uilta, Nivkh”; participants of the project: Kyoko Murasaki (Head), Toshimitsu Asakura, Jiro Ikegami, Hiroshi Nakagawa, Tomomi Sato, Robert Austerlitz, Tjeerd de Graaf, Robert Ramsey, Kirsten Refsing, Galina Otaina, Čuner Taksami). Materials collected in the framework of this project were published in “Ethnic Minorities in Sakhalin” (1993, 13 articles, 276 pages).

An impressive practical result of international cooperation is the Uilta primer, which was recently published in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk (2008). The author number one of this primer is Prof. Ikegami who patiently waited for a number of years and at last his dream has come true!

It seems to me that nowadays the native language endangerment in Sakhalin has reached the critical point and for that reason some urgent measures need to be taken.

At the moment there are very few experts in both Nivkh and Uilta. It is no exaggeration that most of them live in Japan: Prof. Ikegami, Prof. Tsumagari (the Uilta language), Prof. Kaneko, Prof. Nakagawa, Dr. Shiraishi, Dr. Tangiku (the Nivkh language). One specialist in Nivkh (Dr. Je. Ju. Gruzdeva) works in Finland, another one (of Nivkh descent) lives and works in Saint-Petersburg, Russia (candidate of sciences L. I. Gašilova). One specialist in Uilta (candidate of sciences L. V. Ozolinja) lives in Novosibirsk. As we see, not so many for insufficiently documented endangered languages which are of great importance for linguistics.

Now we have a splendid opportunity for joint work with Japanese colleagues on Nivkh texts recorded by Je. A. Krejnovič. A number of years ago Krejnovič's

archives shifted from Leningrad to Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk. I am confident that it is necessary to make everything possible in order to publish (at least partly) these highly valuable materials after relevant linguistic operations, which require great efforts and a lot of time.

As regards Krejnovič's recordings on magnetic tape, they were digitalized in 2008 in Saint-Petersburg (Институт русской литературы РАН (Пушкинский Дом), Фонограммархив). Strangely enough all the boxes (13) with magnetic tape lack any inscriptions on them. In other words it is rather problematic to find out all necessary metadata (Who? Where? When? What?). Nevertheless, I do not lose hope to find out metadata in the process of working with those recordings.

Moreover in Krejnovič's archives, which are now stored at the Sakhalin Regional Museum in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, there are folklore recordings on paper. Unfortunately I have now little information about those recordings.

Recently digitalized in Puškinskij Dom (Saint-Petersburg) audiomaterials, which were recorded in the 70-s by G. A. Otaina, are also stored at the Sakhalin Regional Museum in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk. These valuable materials need to be deciphered and translated, too.

So the first promising area of Russian-Japanese linguistic and folkloristic collaboration is connected with the materials of Je. A. Krejnovič and G. A. Otaina.

As to the second such area, it goes without saying that under severe circumstances of language endangerment urgent measures need to be taken in order to make new and maybe in some cases the last recordings of Nivkh, Uilta, the Sakhalin Evenki, and the Sakhalin Nanai. Dr. Shiraishi works regularly and very successfully in this field (in the fruitful "Nivkh field"). Unfortunately other Russian and Japanese specialists visit Sakhalin not so regularly and the results of their "text hunting" are rather modest. In any case, Russian-Japanese collaboration in that area is highly desirable. Of course, first of all I mean joint expeditions.

The third area of Russian-Japanese linguistic collaboration concerning minority languages of Sakhalin could be a compilation of comprehensive Nivkh dictionary.

The Nivkh dialects (idioms) are actually very different, it may be that there are two Nivkh languages. At least G. A. Otaina was confident that the Amur Nivkh and the Sakhalin Nivkh should be regarded as languages, not dialects. She worked with Sakhalin Nivkhs seriously and she was fully aware of substantial differences between so called Nivkh dialects. Besides, we have very little information about the Schmidt dialect and about territorial variants within the Nivkh idioms. All in all linguists need now and will perhaps more urgently need in the future a "Comparative Dictionary of the Nivkh idioms". Such a dictionary can be enriched with words extracted from folklore texts recorded by Je. A. Krejnovič and G. A. Otaina. The dictionary should include numerous collocations illustrating how words are used; in my opinion, it is

necessary to indicate borrowings from other languages – first of all from the representatives of the Manchu-Tungusic language family. All Nivkh words should be translated into Russian, English and Japanese.

Of course, such projects look more or less fantastic but in any case anything depends on us.

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