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Preface to the Texts

1. The folklore texts presented in the book were recorded during M.M. Khasanova and A.M. Pevnov's twelve joint expeditions to the Negidals from 1981 to 2000. Before 1981 we were engaged in studying the Evenki language and first of all its Far-Eastern dialects that can be found on the territory of Ayano-Mayskiy and Tuguro-Chumikanskiy regions of Khabarovsk Territory. In 1981 we carried out field studies in Vladimirovka village, region named after Polina Osipenko, Khabarovsk Territory, where along with the Evenki folklore texts recording our purpose was to study the language, folklore, and culture of the Negidals.

The given book is thought of as a first part of the work; here the folklore texts that were recorded in different years from different people are accompanied by folkloristic, anthropological, as well as linguistic analysis. The first part presents to the readers the Negidals' myths and tales. The second part is supposed to present the heroic legends, *talung* in Negidal, and also paroemia. Folkloristic and anthropological interpretation should necessarily accompany these texts as in the first part; otherwise they are likely to remain for the most part a "thing-in-itself". Concerning the linguistic study, the second part is supposed to cover phonetic innovations in the Negidal language, and also some peculiarities of the lexis.

2. During all years of working among the Negidals we recorded folklore texts almost exclusively from dictation and we always worked together, simultaneously putting down one and the same text. From our point of view, such a way of recording has its substantial advantages in comparison with tape recording.

Some comments should be made about the transcription of the Negidal folklore texts. It was difficult and for the most part impossible to fix on paper all subtleties of the Negidal phonetics, that is why in addition to Cyrillic alphabet we used minimum other signs and diacritics. As a rule we faced no problems with consonants but there were and are problems with vowels. Not only we but all who recorded texts or separate words in the Negidal language were facing similar problems, though. One can easily make sure of it noting how differently all the researchers transcribed Negidal vowels. All this clearly points to the fact that the Negidal phonetics (and first of all vowels) should be thoroughly studied with the help of special equipment.

We decided to publish our Negidal folklore texts predominantly in the same transcription they were recorded during our fieldwork. Corrections were made if there were evident mistakes. Such transcription is by no means a phonologic one; of course we realise that it is far from being perfect as a phonetic one too. We tried not to correct the texts out of "it should be so", or "it can't be so" principles; nevertheless, in some cases we had to make more or less important corrections.

Our practice has shown that the "raw" original transcription can be useful for the study of the Negidal phonetics. For example, in the Negidal language the pronunciation of the open short vowels **a**, **ɛ**, and probably **o**, depends on their position

in the word [Колесникова, Константинова 1968, p.112]. If they are in the first syllable of the word they are pronounced with maximum clearness but close to the end of the word and especially in the ultima, the weakening of articulation is often, i.e. these vowels are represented in their reduced variants.

In many cases the vowel reduction can be taken as a breach of vowel harmony; actually, this issue requires a special investigation. The idea that the vowel reduction is characteristic of the Negidal language was confirmed when we started asking the Negidals to write some “diagnostic” words that we had prepared beforehand. The fact that our informants didn’t know how to write the words of their mother tongue “correctly”, contributed to the success of the experiment – we had a unique opportunity for using the regrettable absence of the Negidals’ own system of writing for the scientific purposes. People who were independently of each other writing in their mother tongue, instinctively gave the same or close writing of the Negidal words that was in some cases significantly different from ours mainly in transcribing the vowels. The given examples were self-recorded by our informants; it should be noted that their speech reflects the peculiarities of the Lower Amgun’ dialect: *адылвэ* (accusative form) ‘fishing net’ (*адилва* in our recording); *тоньнгэ* ‘five’ (*тонҢа* in our recording); *быя* ‘man’ (*бэйэ* in our recording); *ымыян* ‘comes’ (*эмэйэн* in our recording); *тигда* ‘rain’ (*тигдэ* in our recording).

It is worth mentioning that more than seventy years ago the Negidals wrote (although the Negidal wasn’t and isn’t a written language!) their words with Russian script just the way their descendants did it ten or twenty years ago. К.М. Мылникова and V.I. Tsintsius who collected material among the Negidals in 1926-1927 noted that “even just a little literate aborigines” wrote *быя* ‘man’, *ылы* ‘enough’, *ымыйгал* ‘come back’ [Мыльникова, Цинциус 1931, p.135]. Finally, it is interesting that pioneer recordings in Negidal made by L.Ya.Sternberg in 1910 sometimes surprisingly remind of the Negidals’ self-recording, cf.: *икта* (i.e. *иктэ* in our recording) ‘teeth’, *буја-ва* (i.e. *бэйэ-вэ* in our recording) ‘man’ (accusative form) at L.Ya.Sternberg and *икта*, *быя* in self-recordings of the 1930s and at the end of the 20th century.

One of the peculiarities of the Negidal language is delabialization of short **o** vowel in case it is in the first and subsequent syllables of the root morpheme (the process doesn’t spread to affixes), for example: *го^айо^а* ‘far’ (< **гойо*, cf. Evenki *горо*), *ко^ахо^ало^а* ‘mittens’ (< **кохоло*, cf. Evenki *коколло*). It is quite likely that close to the end of the word, especially in the ultima, the delabialized **o** is pronounced with reduction. It should be said that in this or that way all previous researchers marked the delabialization of the **o**.

Besides, in the history of the Negidal language another vowel delabialization occurred; it wasn’t at once that we understood its essence and results. It is close to the above mentioned one in the sense that the original labialized vowel was sure to repeat in all syllables of the root (the root of a non-borrowed Negidal word consists maximum of three syllables). The delabialization of the first kind is different from the second one in the final result: in the first case it is **o^а**, and in the second – **э**. Here are the examples with the delabialization of the second type: *эмэн* ‘one’ (cf. Oroch and

Udihe *омо*, Evenki *умун*), *элэхи* ‘squirrel’ (cf. Oroch *олоки*, Udihe *олохи*, Evenki *улукй*). The fact that such Negidal words as *эмэн* and *элэхи* really have the *э* vowel can be proved by the examples of the Negidals’ self-recordings: they write *ы* in these words (i.e. *ымын*, *ылыхи*), by which they always transcribe *э* (for example, *быя* ‘man’).

It is necessary to mark another interesting peculiarity which we were able to find out only because we usually did not correct the original recording of the narratives, leaving for subsequent analysis various variants: we came to the conclusion that in the Negidal language the negative auxiliary verb is pronounced *атам*, not *этэм* (as it was thought before), the verb with the meaning ‘to be lost’ – *аман-*, not *эмэн-* and so on. The reason lies in regressive incontiguous vowel assimilation under the influence of the *a*-like long *э̄*. It is interesting that in rare cases similar phonetic change happens in the Udihe and Oroch languages.

By the way, transcribing of the *a*-like long *э̄* is very difficult indeed: in some cases we represent it as *ā* or *a* (which contradicts the principles of vowel harmony but is close to what we could hear), or as *э̄^а*, *э̄* or *э*. It is evidently impossible to provide the accurate transcription here without using some methods of experimental phonetics.

It is necessary to give some explanations concerning our use of some graphemes and diacritics. The length of vowels is marked by a line above the letter. The grapheme *э* denotes a vowel characteristic of all Manchu-Tungus languages (non-labialized, middle zone, middle rise). The grapheme *e* (*ē*) represents closed vowel like, for example, Russian in *тень* ‘shadow’ or French in *été* ‘summer’. The digraph *o^a* represents delabialized (or partly delabialized) *o*. The letter *κ* denotes not only back occlusive voiceless sound, but also uvular one, which is used in the Negidal language not always according to the law of vowel harmony (for example, in diminutive affix *-ккән* the doubled consonant is always uvular). The graphemes *ǰ*, *ч*, *н’* represent correspondingly voiced, voiceless, and nasalized palatalized.

All Negidal affixes are given only in one harmonic variant, for example: *-ва*, *-йа*, *-нак-*.

3. The Negidal folklore texts chosen to be published in the book represent the oldest folklore genres – they are myths and tales about animals (for details see the folklore section). They certainly do not illustrate the genre diversity of the Negidal folklore. However, the framework of the book imposed certain limits. We have chosen tales about animals because they, first of all, have up to now kept live link with the myths and historically are their integral part, though at present the Negidals themselves see them as tales. Secondly, their seemingly straight plots reflect common Manchu-Tungus patterns and images as well as the contacts of the Negidals with other ethnic groups.

In the comments to the texts we tried to show and explain the peculiarities of the folklore language, demonstrate the genre belonging of the texts where possible, characterize some ethnic traditions and, finally, in several cases give our personal understanding of the deep sense of a number of narratives if we saw it darkened (first of all it concerns myths). Besides, we tried to give, wherever possible, plot

correspondences in order to show that the Negidal folklore is close to that of other peoples (cognate by language as well as not cognate). As there is not much published material on the folklore of many Siberian and Far-Eastern peoples and the material available is fragmentary, we cannot claim our comparison of the plots to be full and complete. The problem of comparative studying of the folklore of Siberian, Far Eastern, and American indigenous peoples still remains unresolved.