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P r e f a c e

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Negidal is one of the seriously endangered Tungusic languages, spoken only by a limited number of elders on the lower Amur region of Russian Far East. It is literally on the brink of extinction before receiving much attention and documentation it deserves. It is not necessary here to say much about the language situation of the past and present nor about the history of Negidal studies, because we can find a detailed description in this volume.

The authors of the present volume, Dr. Marina M. Khasanova and her husband Dr. Alexander M. Pevnov, have been engaged in the Negidal language and folklore for over twenty years. They are currently senior researchers of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, and are admittedly the first and best specialists of the Negidal language and folklore.

In August 1998, Mr. Shinjiro Kazama (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies) and I had an opportunity to visit a Negidal village accompanied by them. They generously introduced us to the local speakers and helped us in many ways. We realized how sincerely and eagerly they had worked on this small language. The results of their long-year field researches, including many folkloristic texts which are now difficult to obtain, have remained unpublished. That is a pity not only for linguistic and other scholarly interests but also for Negidal and other minorities who are rapidly losing their linguistic and folkloristic heritage.

I proposed to them to publish their materials in Japan, and they willingly agreed. It became realistic after the ELPR project started. In May 2001, I visited St. Petersburg to discuss the publication plan with them. They were eager to publish their materials, but were too busy to devote themselves to the task. I offered them a one-month stay in Sapporo, so that they could concentrate on the preparation for publishing. As a result, they spent the whole November of the year at my office, tapping the keys of personal computers from morning till night, to achieve much progress toward publishing their materials. Before leaving Japan, they attended the 2nd International Conference of ELPR held in Kyoto (Nov. 30 - Dec.1, 2001) and gave us impressive lectures based on their profound field experiences.

Back to their home after the one-month intensive work in Sapporo, they made daily efforts to finish the task. All that I could do was to encourage them by setting the deadline, by which they faithfully completed the whole body of this massive volume. I heartily appreciate their earnest attitude to their work. After receiving the final version of their manuscripts in digitalized form, I made the necessary editing works with the careful assistance of Ms. Kayo Kobayashi. I hope that I have made no serious mistakes in the editing process.

The present volume contains not only many folkloristic texts with each plot and translation, but also an elaborate description about the Negidal language and folklore. Most explanations are provided in bilingual form of Russian and English. This is undoubtedly the best (hopefully not the last) collection of the Negidal folklore. We are delighted and proud to add the volume to our ELPR publication series.