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| Title | Introduction |
| Author(s) | Tsumagari, Toshiro |
| Citation | ツングース言語文化論集, 17, 5-6 アレクサンドル・カンチュガ著 ; 津曲敏郎編訳 = Aleksandr Kanchuga ; edited with a Japanese translation by Toshiro Tsumagari, ウデヘ語自伝テキスト = An Udehe autobiographical text with a Russian translation. 大阪学院大学情報学部, 2002.8, vi, 337p. (科学研究費補助金(特定領域研究(A))研究成果報告書, . 環太平洋の「消滅に瀕した言語」にかんする緊急調査研究) (ツングース言語文化論集, 17) (ELPR publication series, A2-019) |
| Issue Date | 2002-08-09 |
| Doc URL | http://hdl.handle.net/2115/57411 |
| Type | report |
| File Information | 04IntroductionEn.pdf |



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Introduction

Toshiro TSUMAGARI

Udehe is a Tungusic minority whose population is 1,902 (in the year 1989), 24% of which (460 persons or less) are supposed to speak the Udehe language as their mother tongue (Girfanova 1994, from which the following local populations are also taken). They live mainly in one of the following four villages in Khavarovsk and the Maritime region: Gvashugi on the basin of the Khor (Xor) river (160 persons), Arsenievo on the basin of the Anyui (Anjuj) river (50), Aguz on the basin of the Samarga river (144), and Krasny Yar (Krasny Jar) on the basin of the Bikin river (400) [See Map].

For a long time, Shnejder's concise grammatical and lexical description on the Khor dialect (Shnejder 1936) has been the only source available in the study of the Udehe language. The situation changed only recently by two important works: Kormushin (1998), a more detailed description including several texts, and Simonov (ed. 1998), a massive collection of the Udehe folklores. Another important contribution is Nikolaeva (1999, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation), which is a huge volume in English and will surely be of great use especially for scholars outside Russia. The latest dictionary was issued by Girfanova (2001). Now that every field is open to foreigners, some Japanese linguists have visited the Udehe villages and made such preliminary reports as folk tale texts (Kazama 1998) and a collection of short sentences (Tsumagari 1997, 1998).

Since 1996 I have visited the village Krasny Yar for several times and continue to study the Udehe language with the consultation of Mr. Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Kanchuga (born in 1934). During his career as a teacher (retired as a principal), he tried to teach Udehe to his pupils with the primer of his own making, and has kept a high competence for the language. Though there was an unsuccessful attempt to make a writing system in 1930s, and there has been another attempt to teach Udehe with a new primer (Kjalundzjuga 1999), the language practically remains nonliterate. It is, therefore, admirable that Kanchuga has the ability to write his native language with Russian script. In reply to my request, he wrote an autobiographical story in Udehe with its Russian translation side by side [See Fig.]. The handwritten text, comprised of 31 chapters, amounts to 329 pages in all, in which he described the details of his boyhood in 1930s and 40s. This is a valuable material

not only as a linguistic text but also as an ethnological description, especially in that it was written by the hand of an Udehe in his native language. The presence of such local talent is surely significant for the future of the language and culture of a minority.

In his Sikhote-alin expeditions in the early 20th century, V. K. Arseniev (1872-1930) often met Udehes and mentioned them in his books such as *Dersu Uzala* (Japanese translations 1965, 1995) and others. He collected a lot of Udehe folk tales, some of which are taken (only in Russian) in Simonov (ed. 1998) mentioned above. As another source of information on the Udehe life at that time is known an autobiographical novel by Kimonko (1964), which was originally written in Udehe but published only in Russian translation. It is interesting to know that Kanchuga's father met both of them. According to the present autobiographical story, his father met Arseniev at the Anyui basin in 1927 and was given a Russian name, Aleksandr. The author's paternal name Aleksandrovich is, therefore, ascribed to Arseniev. Aleksandr (Sr.) also met Kimonko to ask why he had made a false representation of an episode of the Kanchugas in his novel.

Including these respects, the present autobiographical text is a witness of the history and life of Udehe during the first half of the 20th century. We can see many traditional scenes of fishing, hunting-gathering and religious life, as well as their involvement in the modern world such as school, socialism and war. I have published the whole story in Japanese translation (Kanchuga/Tsumagari tr. 2001), and the present volume aims to represent the original form of the Udehe-Russian bilingual text, not only for scholarly use but hopefully also for the Udehe people to appreciate their traditional life and language.

* This introduction is a revised version of the Chapter 1, Tsumagari 2001a.