THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE OF THE ISLAND OF SAKHALIN

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This paper deals with the current sociolinguistic situation among the indigenous peoples living on the island of Sakhalin, the Russian Far East. The discussion is based on the criteria developed by the UNESCO project on endangered languages for the assessment of language vitality and usage of minority languages in different domains, such as home, education, and media. The paper also discusses language and identity issues, especially the problem concerning the applicability of official statistical data to the description of language shift in multiethnic societies of the type present on Sakhalin.

Статья посвящена социолингвистической ситуации среди коренных малочисленных народов, живущих на Сахалине, на Дальнем Востоке России. Она базируется на критериях, разработанных группой ЮНЕСКО по языкам, находящимся под угрозой исчезновения, для оценки языковой ситуации в целом и изучения использования языков меньшинств в различных сферах: дома, в системе образования, в СМИ и т.д. Кроме того, в статье обсуждаются вопросы соотношения языка и идентичности, в частности проблема применимости официальной статистики к описанию языкового сдвига в таких многоэтничных сообществах, каким является Сахалин.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the present-day situation regarding the maintenance of the indigenous languages spoken on Sakhalin, that is, Nivkh (isolate), and Uilta, Ewenki, and Nanai (Tungusic).[1] The Ainu language, which used to be spoken in the southern half of the island, is considered to be extinct at the moment. The last Ainu speakers on Sakhalin passed away in the 1970s. It is true that there are still people identifying themselves as Ainu, but they are not recognized as an indigenous minority and are excluded from the official list of the indigenous peoples of the Russian Federation. On the other hand, the small Nanai group living in

1 The paper was written in the framework of the project "The resource curse in the circumpolar areas: Russian and international experience in the field of analysis and resolution of conflicts over non-renewable resources in areas traditionally inhabited by indigenous ethnic groups" (RSCF, grant No. 15-18-00112, project leader Dmitri Funk).

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Poronaisk, which was resettled from the Amur region only recently, in 1947, has officially been recognized as one of the "Northern" ethnic groups of Sakhalin with all the formal rights accompanying this status, including linguistic.[2] The languages of the four ethnic groups – the Nivkh, Uilta, Ewenki, and Nanai – are today protected by the regional law "On the Languages of the Indigenous Peoples Living in the Territory of the Sakhalin Region" (as of 16 October 2007).

Field materials for this research were collected during two expeditions to Sakhalin, in 2009 and 2013. The survey was conducted in the settlements of Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, Poronaisk, Nogliki, Val, Okha, and Nekrasovka, as well as in a number of reindeer and fishing camps. In the course of the fieldwork, spontaneous narratives and conversations with informants were recorded in open format. They include altogether 23 interviews with 26 individuals from the first field trip and 47 interviews with 60 individuals from the second field trip. In addition, official data on the sociolinguistic situation of Sakhalin, such as the results of the All-Russia Population Census and materials obtained from the regional administrations, are used.

The analysis is based on the criteria developed by the UNESCO project on Endangered Languages, as published in their concept paper titled "Language Vitality and Endangerment". The UNESCO experts established nine criteria for the comprehensive evaluation of the sociolinguistic situation of a speech community (see UNESCO 2003). Almost all of these criteria are discussed in this paper for each of the indigenous languages spoken on Sakhalin.[3] An exception is the criterion of language documentation, an issue that would require more space and is discussed in more detail in Mamontova (2015).

2. AN OVERVIEW OF THE LANGUAGE SHIFT

The current linguistic situation on Sakhalin in all settlements is characterized by a completed shift to the Russian language. The indigenous languages are no longer being transmitted to, or acquired by, children. They retain the status of first languages only for the older and a small part of the middle generation of speakers, whereas Russian is the only medium of communication for the younger members. The same situation may be observed among all indigenous communities in northern Siberia and the Far East with very few exceptions (such as, locally, Tundra Nenets). The language shift, which had started already earlier,

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2 The official term for the administrative category is "the Small Peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East" (малочисленные народы Севера, Сибири и Дальнего Востока).

3 A similar approach with the focus on the sociolinguistic comparison of Sakhalin Nivkh and Hokkaido Ainu was earlier adopted by Gruzdeva & Länsisalmi (2014).

accelerated in the 1960s (see Vakhtin 2001) and resulted in the rapid marginalization of the indigenous languages. In the following, the course of this development is summarized separately for each of the languages of Sakhalin. The data is based on sociolinguistic surveys conducted on the island during the second half of the twentieth century and until the present day.

The Nivkh language

A comprehensive study of the language situation among the Sakhalin Nivkh, carried out in 1974 at Nogliki, showed that 60.3% of Nivkh parents spoke with their children both the mother tongue and Russian, while an additional 9.9% used only Nivkh (Boiko 1988: 203). However, a survey conducted in 1983 indicated that 94.2% of urban Nivkhs communicated at work in Russian, while only 5.8% of them used both languages. Among the rural population the figures were 91.2% and 7.2%, respectively. At that time, the Russian language was already used as a means of communication in the family domain (Boiko & Fedorov 1988). A sociolinguistic survey conducted by Ekaterina Gruzdeva and Yulia Leonova in the same settlement in 1989 revealed that only 23.8%, or 75 persons, the youngest of whom was at the age of 40, were fluent in the Nivkh language, while 29.5% did not know the language at all. The majority of the Nivkh population, or 53.3%, according to these researchers, had an incomplete knowledge of Nivkh. Hence, the Russian language undoubtedly prevailed in all domains (Gruzdeva & Leonova 1990; Gruzdeva 2015: 247).

In 1990, the first international survey "On the Languages of the Minorities of Sakhalin – Ainu, Uilta, Nivkh" took place. It was aimed at investigating the linguistic and ethnographic situation of all the local indigenous minorities (see Murasaki 1993; de Graaf 1992). Based on the data collected at that time, Nikolay Vakhtin placed the Nivkh language in the fourth group of five with regard to its level of endangerment. This group is characterised as follows: "only the older generation is able to speak the language, a very small part of the middle-aged people is able to understand simplified speech. The total population is Russian-speaking" (Vakhtin 2001: 178).

In 2004, another survey of the sociolinguistic situation of the Nivkh took place in the framework of a project on the "Indigenous Peoples of the Far East in the Post-Soviet Era". The members of this project worked at the village of Chir-Unvd of Adotymovskii District, a less-surveyed Nivkh settlement on central Sakhalin. According to Vlada Baranova, one of the participants, the situation in this village was different from Nogliki, which, together with the village of Nekrasovka on northern Sakhalin, is recognized as a "centre" of the

Nivkh language. Even so, the conclusions made by Baranova on the basis of her observations are very similar to those that can be made in all Nivkh settlements today: "Judging by the published data and field materials, almost no one uses the Nivkh language in everyday life; the language continues to function as a means for the maintenance of the common identity and serves as a cohesive symbol of the community" (Baranova 2008: 193).

Consequently, all researchers consider the present-day situation of the Nivkh language unsatisfactory with regard to language maintenance. The Japanese linguist Hidetoshi Shiraishi pointed out in 2006 that all fluent speakers he knew at that time were above the age of 60 (which means that they are today over 70). According to his long-term field observations, middle-aged people can follow conversations in Nivkh, but they are not able to answer in this language. Yet, in some places, Nivkh is still occasionally used among the oldest community members. He concludes that the use of the Nivkh language among family members is rare (Shiraishi 2006: 9).

The Uilta language

There is no comprehensive data about Uilta speakers before the era of *perestroika*. In the Soviet population censuses of 1959 and 1979 the Uilta were listed as "Oroch", the name of another Tungusic-speaking people, living in the northern part of the Maritime Province of the Russian Far East. Even later, the Uilta (also known as the Orok) have been confused with the Oroch, or also with the Orochen, a subsection of the Ewenki in the Upper and Middle Amur region (see Missonova 2006; 2009). According to the members of an expedition that surveyed the Uilta in 1999, the Uilta language was used strictly at home. The majority of fluent speakers belonged to the old generation, while only a few middle-aged individuals could speak the language. The Uilta are divided into two geographical groups known as the northern Uilta, concentrated in the settlement of Val, and the southern Uilta, concentrated in the township of Poronaisk. Among the northern Uilta less than 21% considered Uilta to be their mother tongue (see Funk et al. 2000; Funk & Zen'ko 2008).

In 2009, Aleksandr Pevnov noticed that the Uilta language was already on the verge of extinction (Pevnov 2009). He estimates that there are today about 15 people at Val, 15 in Poronaisk, and one person at Nogliki who are able to express themselves in Uilta.[4] According to more recent information the actual figure for

4 Aleksandr Pevnov: "On the uniqueness of the Orok (Uilta) language", a paper presented at the HALS seminar "Insular Worlds: The Indigenous Peoples and Languages of Sakhalin and

Poronaisk may be even less, perhaps no more than 10 individuals, only one of whom may be regarded as a fluent speaker (FM 2013). Nevertheless, the Uilta language remains alive and is still used as a means of communication by the older generation, especially at the settlement of Val.

The current sociolinguistic situation is reflected by the fact that the percentage of ethnic Uilta who considerer Uilta to be their native language is rapidly declining. According to the official census data, the proportion was still 42% in 1989, while it was only 3.7% in 2002 and 3.5% in 2010.[5]

The Ewenki language

The first sociolinguistic survey among the Sakhalin Ewenki was carried out by Klavdiya Novikova and Valentina Savel'eva in 1953 (Novikova & Savel'eva 1953). In their report, they mention that the majority of Ewenki were fluent in their ethnic language. Moreover, the Sakhalin Ewenki still preserved their unique oral folklore tradition and some of them were able to perform long epic texts. However, in the 1960s, as Chuner Taksami noted, while the elder and middle generations had a good command of their ethnic language, some children already spoke only Russian (Taksami 1968: 40).

In the 1990s, the language of the Sakhalin Ewenki was studied by the linguist and native Ewenki speaker Nadezhda Bulatova. She concluded that the state of preservation of the language was far from satisfactory (Bulatova 1999). This seems to have been the last survey conducted so far concerning the sociolinguistic situation of the Sakhalin Ewenki. Very little is known about the present-day situation, especially at the settlement of Viakhtu, where the largest number of Ewenki individuals is concentrated. However, in view of the information available about the other indigenous groups on the island, it may be assumed that the current situation among the Sakhalin Ewenki is similarly alarming. According to official census data, only 9.9% and 8.1% of Ewenki individuals living on Sakhalin selected Ewenki as their native language in 2002 and 2010, respectively. Even so, recent field materials reveal that, at the settlement of Val, Ewenki still functions as a means of interethnic communication between some elderly Ewenki and Uilta individuals (FM 2009; 2013).

Hokkaido" at the University of Helsinki on 19 May 2014. See also Pevnov 2016 in the present volume.

5 Note, however, that the question concerning "native languages" in 2010 was different from the one used in the earlier censuses. In 2010, the question concerned not the respondents' "native languages" as such, but, more generally, their "knowledge of languages". The statistical effect of this difference in formulation is difficult to estimate.

A summary of the language situation on Sakhalin according to the official census of 2010 is presented in Table 1. In addition to the three ethnic groups discussed above, the table includes the Nanai, a post-WW2 immigrant group recognized as "indigenous", as well as the Koreans, a pre-WW2 immigrant population not recognized as "indigenous" to the island.

Table 1 Language Situation on Sakhalin according to the Census of 2010

Ethnic group	Knowledge of the ethnic language		Knowledge of the Russian language	
	Individuals	Percentage	Individuals	Percentage
Nivkh	118	5.2	2,287	99.9
Uilta	9	3.5	258	99.6
Ewenki	17	8.1	208	99.5
Nanai	11	7.4	148	100.0
Koreans	6,169	25	24,865	99.5

3. ETHNIC IDENTITIES AND MOTHER TONGUES

Judging from the interviews conducted during the field work on Sakhalin, it seems that ethnic identity among the local minorities is no longer connected with ethnic language preservation and transmission. This situation is typical of almost all the "Northern Minorities" in Russia and may be traced back to the Soviet nationality policy, which typically promoted symbolic forms of identity restricting public language usage to special events such as, for example, indigenous festivals and holidays.

Dmitry Gorenburg (2006) writes that assimilation is a slow, multi-generational process, so that the official statistics on language and identity change do not reflect the actual extent to which individuals who grew up in the Russian-speaking environment have switched their primary language of communication to Russian. He points out that the construction of census questions concerning language and ethnicity resulted in the underestimation of the extent of linguistic Russification among minorities in Soviet times. Typically, the census question about language asked the respondents to indicate their "native" language, rather than the language they used most frequently. This question immediately followed the census question about nationality, so that many respondents simply restated their nationality as their native language, even if they were far more fluent in Russian (Gorenburg 2006: 6).

Therefore, beginning with the Census of 1939 the data on "native languages" say more about the respondents' expected ethnolinguistic identity than indicate

the actual language of communication within a given group. This problem has been actively discussed since the Census of 2002, and especially prior to the Census of 2010 (see Stepanov 2011), but no change in the construction of the census questions has been made so far. As a result, the data conceal a significant imbalance between the number of speakers of the ethnic language and the percentage of those who consider this language to be "native". Typically, the second percentage is much higher. Even so, careful field observations suggest that, in some cases, if we take into account all speakers, including those who know the language passively, the situation does not look totally catastrophic.

What seems to be especially significant for the analysis of the sociolinguistic situation on Sakhalin is that official data still do not allow the possibility of having two or more languages as mother tongues. Moreover, experience from the field suggests that such information is difficult to obtain. In multiethnic societies it is not sufficient to assume a one-to-one correspondence between an ethnic name and an ethnic language, as the choice can also be situational, based on public expectations and/or the preconceived ideas of the interviewer. Due to its complicated ethnic and political history, Sakhalin provides a number of peculiar cases of the interweaving of languages and identities.

For example, in the southern part of Sakhalin many individuals with multiple identities prefer to identify themselves, at least officially, with one of the indigenous groups. It gives them the possibility of exploiting the special rights and privileges allocated to the indigenous minorities. Some individuals in mixed families living in Poronaisk are officially registered as "indigenous", mainly Nivkh, but in everyday life they refer to themselves as Koreans, and their command of the Korean language can be higher than that of the indigenous language corresponding to their official ethnicity. Sometimes they do not know the indigenous language at all (see Missonova 2009: 96; Mamontova 2015: 196–199). The situation seems to be even more complicated when there is a choice between more than two identities. One respondent with a Japanese-Uilta-Ewenki ethnic background decided to refer to himself as Ewenki in order to "support the smallest minority on the island". He does not speak Ewenki, but thanks to his official identity he has become a rather well-known Ewenki activist, which allows him to take part in indigenous peoples' meetings as a representative of the local Ewenki community.

In some cases, however, it is difficult to explain the choice of ethnicity from a solely utilitarian point of view. People may make a choice in favour of a "large" ethnic group for many reasons, among which is the factor of social comfort (see Shakhovtsov 2009: 57; Terekhina & Funk 2015). The impact of historical transformations should also be considered. Some residents of mixed origin on Sakhalin have changed their identity, personal names, and language several times,

each case being unique and difficult to categorize. Thus, one lady was born to a Japanese-Nivkh family where only Japanese served as the language of communication between her parents. After her father's death her mother was married to a Korean, and she had to adopt a Korean name and the Korean language. However, as a young woman she decided to resume her Japanese name because she had never felt herself to be Korean. The Japanese name was subsequently recorded in her passport. Nowadays she identifies herself mainly as a Nivkh (her mother's ethnicity) and uses two names – Japanese and Russian. She has not managed to retain her Korean language skills and speaks today mainly Russian. Yet, she was very proud of being able to communicate in simple Japanese in a grocery store during a trip to Japan. It is curious that the Korean language, nevertheless, returned to her family – it was picked up by her son, who has no Korean "blood" (see Mamontova 2015: 199).

Quite often native speakers, especially those who know the language fluently, indicate the lack of ethnic self-consciousness as one of the main problems of language loss among the middle-aged and younger generations. The situation is made more precarious by the very small proportion of elderly people, especially males, in all of the indigenous populations, as shown in Table 2 below. Old people aged over 65, most of whom still know the ethnic languages, constitute only 3 to 9 per cent of the total ethnic groups.

Table 2 Age and sex composition of the indigenous populations of Sakhalin[6]

Group	Total	Men %	Women %	Rural %	Median age	18–35 %	> 65 %
Nivkh	2,221	44	56	42	28.2	34	3.0
Uilta	254	45	55	42	29.1	36	3.0
Ewenki	199	32	68	68	32.2	35	4.0
Nanai	128	40	60	20	34.7	27	9.0
Total	2,802	43	57	43	31.1	34	3.5

However, discussions with local informants suggest that people usually have a positive attitude to their ethnic languages. The problem is rather that they do not know in what sphere, or domain, these languages could be used. Since Russian is the only language that provides access to education and employment, people believe that there is no need to develop a knowledge of the ethnic languages.

6 The table reflects the situation in April 2013, and is based on data received from the Department of Indigenous Affairs of Sakhalin Oblast.

Paradoxically, the elders hardly ever help their children to acquire a knowledge of the ethnic languages; instead, they shift the responsibility to school teachers. They explain this by lack of time and social problems. This situation is well known from other parts of Siberia. For instance, Ewenki elders in Central Siberia usually say that they do not use the Ewenki language at home because "children cannot speak it" or make too many mistakes in pronunciation. Therefore, according to them, "it is better to let this language die rather than spoil it".

As a result, the ethnic mother tongues have gradually been excluded from the daily environment and started to be perceived of as something inappropriate. One respondent recalled her first days at Nekrasovka, where she was resettled along with other residents from the settlement of Rybnovsk after the severe earthquake of 1995, in the following way:

> When I arrived at Nekrasovka, I was surprised that young people of my age did not speak their [Nivkh] language. Well, I started to look around, to visit the older women so that I would not lose my language. It was like a thirst for the language; [I wanted] to speak it with someone. I scared one grandmother to death. I was thinking of where I could go … and there was one grandmother, Chetken. She was so beautiful, with big round eyes, she was very pudgy, like a ball. I thought, "Why not to go there and make the acquaintance of her?" Our people had not yet been resettled from the Rybnovsk coast, none of our people was there [at Nekrasovka] at that time. Well, I went to her, came into the hallway, knocked at the door. When she looked out, I said to her in Nivkh [speaks Nivkh]. She stared at me for a while and then quickly closed the door. I was standing in the hallway. I felt myself confused. I thought, "Oh my God, is it possible that even grandmothers do not speak their language here?" Then she opened the door and asked, "You want what?" (Чего тебе хочет?). I again spoke in Nivkh to her. "Oh", she said, "you have scared me, oh, how frightened I am! You look like a Russian. Our young people here do not speak their language. You are so young but how well you speak!" Oh, it was such a warm welcome! Then we became friends with her. I would come to talk to her. (FM 2013, Nekrasovka, recorded by N. Mamontova.)

It seems that in the current situation of language shift only early childhood immersion "language nest" programmes, which have been successfully introduced in New Zealand, Hawaii, Canada, and Finland, could bring the Sakhalin languages back into practice. A programme aiming at the revival of the languages of Sakhalin on similar lines was started by a group of Finnish scholars in 2015 at Nekrasovka (see Gruzdeva & Janhunen 2015). Unfortunately, it may turn out to be difficult to change the situation because of the lack of a suitable linguistic environment and long-term language planning programmes.

4. INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN EDUCATION

The teaching of the indigenous languages on Sakhalin at schools began in the late 1920s. The first boarding schools and *kul'tbazy* (cultural bases), which were aimed at eliminating illiteracy among adults, were opened at Nogliki and on the Rybnovsk coast of the Sea of Okhotsk. The Nivkh teaching programme was developed by E.A Kreinovich. He also created a special training programme for Nivkh speakers who worked as "native teachers".[7]

Until the late 1950s, the Nivkh language was used in preparatory classes in the majority of the local boarding schools (Taksami 1967: 231–235). There is no information on the use of other indigenous languages in school education in the Soviet part of the island. On the Japanese side, until 1945, Uilta was used as a language of instruction in a few schools. After the adoption of the Law on Education (1958) in the Soviet Union, schooling was completely switched to Russian; minority languages were not taught even as a subject. A remarkable exception was the Korean language, as used by the local Korean community. Despite the fact that the Sakhalin Koreans were not citizens of the Soviet Union, the government initially took efforts to provide Korean schools with textbooks, either translated from Russian or specially written and printed for Korean children (Lankov 2010). However, in 1962, the Korean schools on Sakhalin were closed down (SHASR, f. 1198, l. 1, c. 105).

In 1977, the Ministry of Education of RSFSR (Russia) decided to design a programme for teaching Nivkh in primary schools. After a long break, in 1981, thanks to the efforts of local activists, Nivkh lessons were resumed in kindergartens and schools (Boiko 1988: 204). The Nivkh language was taught at school three hours a week from the second to the fourth grades. Given the difference between the two main Nivkh dialects, two separate primers were compiled in 1981–1982: by V.M. Sangi and G.A. Otaina for the East Sakhalin dialect, and by Ch.M. Taksami, M.N. Pukhta, and A.M. Vingun for the Amur dialect (also spoken on Western Sakhalin).

In the late 1980s some further positive developments took place; for example, the government resumed publishing activities in the languages of the indigenous minorities, and a local radio station started broadcasting in Nivkh. Scholars and activists made attempts to revitalize the minority languages also by introducing language classes at secondary schools (see de Graaf & Shiraishi 2004). In the

7 The original document concerning the training programme is stored at the Sakhalin Oblast Regional Museum: ASORM, f. 6473, c. 103, 196.

academic year 1993/94, the Nivkh language was taught in 14 schools from the first to the ninth grades (Baranova 2008: 189).

However, this flourishing period lasted only from the end of the 1980s until the middle of the 1990s. Already in the year 1997/98, because of the economic crisis, many of these initiatives were discontinued. On the other hand, the most positive period with regard to the teaching and studying of the Nivkh language coincided exactly with the middle of the 1990s, when more than 200 pupils had two obligatory and one optional class of Nivkh a week (Arefiev 2014: 430–431). Additionally, throughout the 1990s, the Office of Public Education (*Upravlenie narodnogo obrazovaniya*) of the Regional Administration of Sakhalin funded the publication of books, including textbooks, in the indigenous languages of the island (SHASR, f. 1198, l. 1, c. 328).

A significant decline in the number of pupils studying the indigenous languages took place only in the 2000s. For example, in 1996/97 the indigenous languages were still being studied by 25.8% of all pupils, while by 2009 the proportion had fallen to 19.9%. In the same period, the proportion of pupils studying Nivkh fell from 30.3% in 1996/97 to 17.3% in 2009, indicating a negative growth of 13% (Arefiev 2014: 121). The most noticeable reduction occurred in the academic year 2010/11. As for Uilta, since 2011 the number of pupils studying this language has remained the same, about 10–14 children in all grades. The general decline in the numbers and proportions of indigenous pupils studying their ethnic languages is evident from Table 3. It may be seen that in the academic year 2012/13 only 2.4% of indigenous students studied their ethnic languages at school. The Nivkh language is currently taught in three schools, at Nekrasovka, Nogliki, and Chir-Unvd.

Table 3 Indigenous languages in Sakhalin schools in 1996–2013

year	1996/97	2001/02	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2012/13
N	660	720	570	556	554	516	512	503
L	170	127	93	97	40	114	102	12
L/N	25.8	18.1	16.3	17.4	7.2	22.1	19.9	2.4

N = total number of indigenous students

L = total number of indigenous students studying the ethnic languages

L/N = percentage of indigenous students studying the ethnic languages

The ethnic languages are also present in some kindergartens on Sakhalin as a so-called “ethnocultural component”. Most importantly, the Nivkh language is taught in the kindergarten of Nekrasovka. According to field observations made in 2013, this activity takes place in two subgroups twice a week and comprises

about 30 children. Each lesson lasts 15–20 minutes. The teacher combines selected topics of the language, mainly basic vocabulary items, with supplementary themes, such as decorative and applied arts. In other words, as in so many other places with indigenous populations around the world, the ethnic language is not an instrument of communication but an element enhancing ethnic cognition. The study of Nivkh at Nekrasovka can be continued at the local elementary school, where the language is taught from the first to the fourth grades one hour per week, with an option of an additional hour from the first to the third grades as an "extracurricular activity".

Until recently Nivkh used to be taught also in the kindergarten at Nogliki, but currently the lessons are suspended. At the moment (as of 2014) the language is taught there from the fifth to the ninth grades only in the former boarding school. In 2009, there were 300 children studying at the local school, among whom there were 79 pupils belonging to the indigenous minorities, mainly the Nivkh. However, only 20 children attended the Nivkh classes (Mamontova 2010). The number of hours allocated to native language teaching has been reduced from 5 hours per week for all grades in 2009 to 4 hours in 2013. There are no Nivkh lessons in the elementary school at Nogliki, a circumstance that creates a serious gap between the kindergarten and the secondary school.

Teachers often point out some psychological peculiarities preventing young people from studying the Nivkh language. According to them, at some point teenagers realize that Nivkh has a lower status in society than Russian – or English. Therefore, they think that the Nivkh lessons are just a waste of time. An almost identical line of argumentation can be heard in the Ewenki District in Central Siberia, where, according to the local teachers, young people regard Ewenki as a language of the older generation, ancestors, or reindeer breeders. Under such circumstances, neither the children nor their parents can imagine that the ethnic language could become a language of communication in any other spheres of social life not connected with the traditional lifestyle. Also, among the Ewenki, some parents are reluctant to teach their children the ethnic language due to the stereotype, widespread in the dominant Russian society, that bilingualism might interfere with the learning of Russian (Mamontova 2014).

The same problem exists on Sakhalin; some parents tend to treat Nivkh and other minority languages as "needless and useless" in modern life. However, the main reason for the unpopularity of the Nivkh language among teenagers is probably the facultative status of the "native language" as a school subject. Due to this facultative status, Nivkh language classes are usually held when all other classes are over and when the children are already too tired to receive new information. Moreover, the Nivkh language is perceived by classmates as a

special subject reserved only for ethnic Nivkh pupils. Teachers normally do not encourage non-Nivkh children to attend the Nivkh language classes, and some teachers even believe that only members of the indigenous community should speak “their language”, for which reason they enroll only “indigenous” children to the classes. The division into “indigenous” and “non-indigenous” pupils serves as a source of mockery among classmates. After some time, indigenous children start regarding the “special lessons” as a sort of punishment. As a result, they finally refuse to attend the Nivkh classes.

Uilta language teaching started only in 2011. The language is taught at the elementary school on the island of Yuzhnyi located not far from Poronaisk. The teacher is a fluent native speaker of the southern dialect of Uilta. Most pupils are of indigenous origin. There are no Uilta lessons in kindergartens. In the settlement of Val, where the majority of the speakers of the northern dialect of Uilta is concentrated, the language is not taught at any stage of education. According to field observations, in 2009, local residents hoped that one day Uilta would appear in the local school programme. There was a teacher who would have been able to teach the language. However, in 2013 the situation remained unchanged, except that the residents had lost their hope in the possibility of language teaching, as all fluent speakers living at Val were already retired.

As for the other indigenous languages of Sakhalin, lessons in Ewenki were introduced in elementary school in the settlement of Viakhtu only four years ago (2010). The Nanai language is present neither in kindergarten nor in school. According to the information received from the director of the boarding school in Yuzhnyi, it is possible that Nanai will be introduced there in the future. However, it can be added to the curriculum only as an optional class which will require additional external funding.

The numbers and proportions of children studying the indigenous languages at kindergartens and schools in the various administrative units of Sakhalin are given in Table 4.

The main problem with the teaching of the indigenous languages seems to be that the teachers lack ambition with regard to their teaching goals. They typically only want to teach the children the type of basic vocabulary that could be needed in everyday life. Neither in kindergartens nor in schools do the indigenous languages serve as instruments of communication. This problem is widespread in all regions where similar indigenous minorities live (see Kazakevich 2010). It may be explained in part by the fact that the time allocated to the language classes is insufficient for the development of a comprehensive bilingualism. The teachers understand this problem and try to focus on making the indigenous languages as attractive as possible for the children.

Table 4 Children studying the indigenous languages on Sakhalin [8]

District	K	S	Total	"mother tongue" as subject					
				grade		O		grade	
				1–4	%		%	5–11	%
Aleksandrovsk		27	27	9	33.0	16	59.2	7	26.0
Nogliki	75	126	201	8	4.0	41	20.4	33	16.4
Okha	54	189	243	29	12.0	29	12.0		
Poronaisk	?	86	86	8	9.3				
Smirnykhovsk		11	11						
Tymovsk	23	31	54	31	57.4	16	29.6		
Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk	?	49	49						
Total	152	519	671	85	12.7	102	15.2	40	6.0

K = number of children studying the indigenous languages at kindergarten

S = number of children studying the indigenous languages at school

O = number of children studying the indigenous languages as an optional subject at school

Another problem is created by outdated textbooks and teaching materials. Among all the indigenous languages of Sakhalin, only Ewenki has a relatively good selection of textbooks and manuals for every stage of schooling. However, many of these materials are intended for children who speak the ethnic language from their childhood – and there are no such children on Sakhalin. For Uilta, the only textbook is an ABC-book compiled by the Japanese linguist Jiro Ikegami several years ago, but since there are no Uilta classes at Val it mainly serves as a decoration at the local administration and school. For Nivkh there are a few textbooks, including a digital manual, but the problem is that these are also designed as if the children were fluent in the language. The teachers constantly complain about the unavailability of new study materials that would be focused on teaching Nivkh as a foreign language.

Some teachers are trying to make changes in old textbooks or even develop new methods of teaching. An additional problem is, however, that the teachers themselves are not fluent in the ethnic languages. One Nivkh teacher commented on the state of affairs in the following way:

> There are no teachers who speak the language fluently. Today the native language can only function for everyday communication. But to know school subjects — physics, geography, biology — in the native language ... well, I do not know. There are no textbooks, we have difficulties with the methodology. There are no manuals to translate. It would be nice if somebody created such textbooks, so

8 The numbers are from the year 2013. The information was received from the Department of Indigenous Affairs of Sakhalin Oblast.

> that, for example, the children could study biology in their native languages, or anatomy. Well, we learn how to say in our language 'eyes', 'head', 'hair', 'stomach', parts of the body ... 'he runs, jumps, eats', 'he is thin, thick', and so on. Actually, we study all this. (FM 2009, Nogliki, recorded by N. Mamontova.)

It is important to add that the Nivkh and Uilta languages are also taught as courses for adults. A few years ago a Uilta enterprise by the name "Geva" at Nogliki started offering free Uilta courses. The teacher is a fluent speaker of the northern dialect. At the moment, these courses are held twice a week at the local museum. In 2013, the Uilta teacher Siriuko Minato, who is a speaker of the southern dialect, was also planning to open similar courses at the local souvenir shop in Poronaisk. Nivkh courses function at "Kykhkykh", the Centre for the Preservation and Development of the Traditional Culture of the Indigenous Peoples based at Nekrasovka. In 2013, some indigenous activists wanted to arrange similar courses in Poronaisk, where the Nivkh language is currently not taught at any stage. However, they could not find a native speaker who would have been able to teach the language to adults with no previous knowledge of the language.

The situation of language teaching for all of the four indigenous languages of Sakhalin in different stages of education, as observed in 2013, is summarized in Table 5.

Table 5 Teaching of the indigenous languages of Sakhalin

Language	Kindergarten	Elementary school	Secondary school	Courses for adults
Nivkh	+	+	+	+
Uilta	–	+	–	+
Nanai	–	–	–	–
Ewenki	–	+	–	–

5. INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE MEDIA AND VISIBILITY

Currently, on Sakhalin there are neither television nor radio programmes in any of the local minority languages. However, in the first half of the 1990s, there was a radio programme in Nivkh. People recall that it was very popular among the locals, and even Russian speakers with a restricted command of the Nivkh language would listen to it. In 2013, a former Nivkh newscaster offered the following recollections of that time:

> I used to work at the Nivkh radio. First they gave us 10 minutes, then I asked for 15 minutes, and after that we obtained a full-day-programme in the Nivkh language. It was interesting. For example, if there was a serious topic, like some material from the administration, it was broadcast in the Amur dialect. For those who understood [the language] we had programmes both in the Amur and Schmidt dialects. Then we [also] created children's programmes. (FM 2013, Nekrasovka, recorded by N. Mamontova.)

In the second part of the 1990s this radio programme was closed down. At the moment, indigenous language media on Sakhalin are represented only by one Nivkh newspaper. Historically, the first newspaper in the Nivkh language, named "The Nivkh Truth", appeared as early as the 1930s (Boiko 1988: 204). However, at the end of the 1930s this activity was discontinued until the era of *perestroika*. Only Korean language media continued to be published during the Soviet period. After a long break, in the 1990s, a supplement to the newspaper "Sakhalin Oil Worker" appeared in Nivkh (SHASR, f. 1198, l. 1, c. 188, p. 45). In 1996, it started being issued as a separate newspaper under the name *Nivkh Dif* 'The Nivkh language'. Since that time the newspaper has been released weekly at Nekrasovka. Local residents may submit articles, and each issue contains materials in the Amur, East Sakhalin, and Schmidt (North Sakhalin) dialects depending on the author. The total circulation of this newspaper is 250 copies (Arefiev 2014: 105). However, the paper often reaches the Nivkh settlements in a random manner. It can also be read at the website of the cultural organization "Kykhkykh", which is responsible for its publication and distribution for free, but not many Nivkh have access to the Internet.

Important work for the preservation of the indigenous cultural heritage is carried out by local residents. In recent years, fairytales and original works of Nivkh writers have been (re)published by the activists at "Kykhkykh", as well as by the local library and museum at Nogliki. These publishing activities are also supported by oil companies working on Sakhalin, such as Sakhalin Energy Ltd. In 2013, with the support of Sakhalin Energy, the famous Nivkh writer Vladimir Sangi published the "Epic of the Sakhalin Nivkh" (Sangi 2013). The book is based on Nivkh oral myths performed by the Nivkh epic teller Khytkuk in 1974. Other recent publications include the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" and the "United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples" in Nivkh (translated by Vladimir Sangi) and Uilta (translated by E.A. Bibikova and I.Ya. Fedyaeva). It may be also be mentioned that the Institute of Bible translation in Moscow has published the *Gospel According*

to St Luke in Nivkh (2000).[9] However, many of these publications have a mainly symbolic significance, and there is an acute lack of modern literature in all the indigenous languages, both for children and adults.

As far as the public visibility of the indigenous languages is concerned, there are hardly any billboards or street signs in any indigenous language on Sakhalin (except that many place names themselves derive from the local languages). This problem is occasionally raised and discussed by some local activists, but no formal request has been made to the regional administration so far. The situation is similar to that in most other parts of Russia, where non-Russian languages have public visibility only in the federal republics, as well as, occasionally, in former autonomous districts.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper has offered an overview of the current sociolinguistic situation among the indigenous minorities of Sakhalin. All indigenous languages historically spoken on the island are today seriously endangered. There are no children or young people on Sakhalin with a good command of an indigenous language. It is difficult to find a fully fluent native speaker even among the middle-aged generation. Official statistics shows that the indigenous languages are increasingly rarely indicated as “mother tongues”. However, there is a difference between the southern and northern parts of Sakhalin. Since many indigenous individuals living on southern Sakhalin descend from mixed Japanese/Korean-indigenous families, their choice of “mother tongue” and ethnic identity is rather situational and dependent on the current nationality policy, within which indigenous people enjoy special privileges. The complicated political history of this part of the island should also be taken into account.

As for language domains, the indigenous languages on Sakhalin are still to some extent present in education and media, as well as in cultural and publishing activities. Some local activists make efforts to promote language preservation and reinvigoration by arranging language courses for adults and translating books and documents into the indigenous languages. In general, the local people on Sakhalin show a positive attitude towards the indigenous languages. However, people do not easily see in which spheres of life these languages could be used. Therefore, most people do not believe that they could be revitalized.

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9 Concerning the Institute for Bible Translation (*Institut perevoda Biblii*) see <www.ibtrussia.org/en>. There are translations of parts of the Bible also to many other “northern” languages, including Ewenki and Nanai.

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