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**CONTEMPORARY FOREST ENETS :
A REPORT FROM RECENT FIELDWORK¹**

This paper communicates several socio-linguistic findings from the author's fieldwork on Forest Enets on the Taimyr Peninsula (22.11.06-19.4.07). The first part of the paper sketches the overall linguistic situation of the Forest Enets. It is followed by a tentative reconstruction of decisive factors which have brought this language to the verge of extinction. The third part discusses the attitudes of the Forest Enets' intelligentsia towards earlier research and research strategies. The paper concludes with a comment on the immediate linguistic future and on the statistical data on Forest Enets published by Krivonogov (1998, 2001).

**1. A SHORT SOCIO-LINGUISTIC AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL
SURVEY ON ENETS AND THE ENETSES**

Forest Enets and Tundra Enets are languages native to the Taimyr Peninsula (*Taimyrskij Dolgano-Nenetskij munitsipal'nij rajon*)², which in earlier research have been classified as dialects of one language.

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² The Romanization of Cyrillics follows the scientific transliteration principles with several small modifications (x = kh, ч = ch, ц = ts). Better-known geographic locations will be written simplified (Taimyr for Tajmyr, Yenisei for Jenisej).

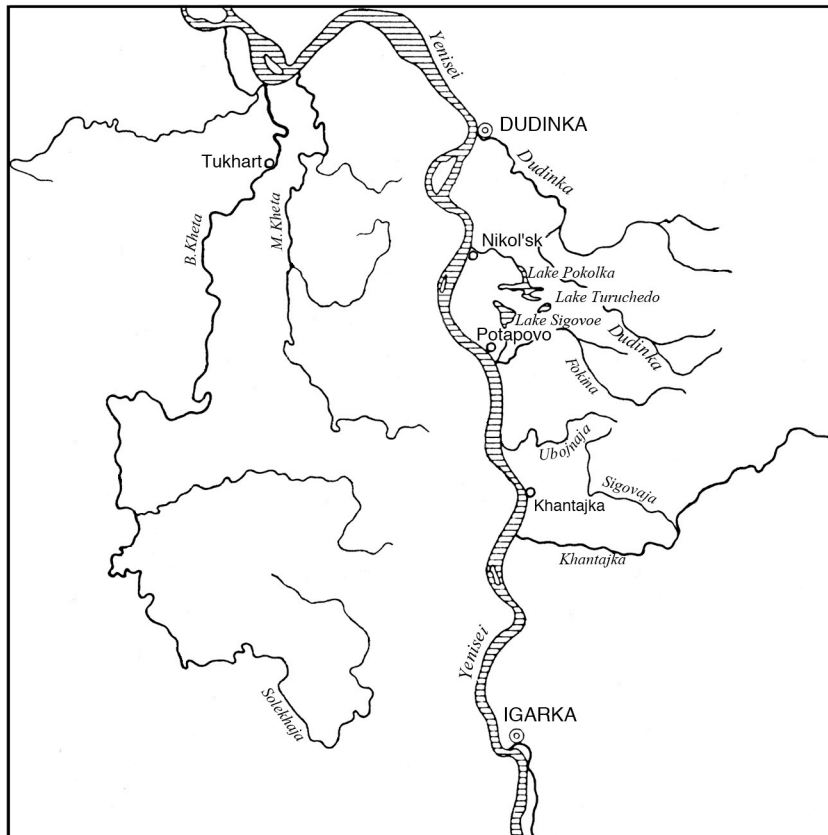
Against the background of recent sources (Labanauskas 2002) and the author's fieldwork it is however justified to speak of two independent though closely related languages, but this is not the topic of this paper.

Both Enets languages belong to the Samoyedic branch of the Uralic language family and although Forest Enets and Tundra Enets are linguistically fairly close, both languages are spoken in two entirely different regions of the Taimyr Peninsula. Tundra Enets, which will not be further considered in this article, is spoken in and around Vorontsovo³ about 300 km north of the district capital Dudinka. The other Enets language, Forest Enets, is spoken nowadays entirely in Potapovo, a village around 100 km south of Dudinka and by a small diaspora in Dudinka. Besides these known enclaves of native speakers, several Enetses are said to live in the tundra around Tukhart (90 km west of Dudinka) but nothing concrete is known about them.

Any recent contacts between speakers of both varieties of Enets are not known.⁴ Currently, around 20 speakers of Forest Enets in Potapovo and an additional 6 speakers in Dudinka remain, but the language is practically no longer used in everyday communication. Many speakers had initial difficulties producing longer narratives in Forest Enets.

³ Earlier the language was spoken also in and around Ust'-Avam and perhaps around Volochanka but there is no recent reliable data available whether the language in the two former villages is still known as an L1 at all. During my fieldwork in Dudinka, no speaker of Tundra Enets was known to reside in the district capital.

⁴ There is however one exception. In Potapovo lives a Tundra Enets speaker who came from Vorontsovo around 40 years ago. Although this speaker has acquired Forest Enets, other speakers of Forest Enets in the village did usually not speak in Forest Enets with her. I managed several meetings with this old lady in the beginning but quickly it became obvious that her Forest Enets had many Tundra Enets elements. This made work with her on either Forest Enets or Tundra Enets impossible as her answers were contradicting themselves almost immediately. It is known that in the early 20th century some Forest Enetses left the Southern Taimyr for Vorontsovo but afterwards no more contacts are known (Vasil'ev 1963: 46).



The region around Potapovo

At least historically, the lives of Forest Enetses and Tundra Enetses differed significantly concerning foraging. As Forest Enetses resided in the taiga, traditional subsistence was mainly based on fishing and hunting. Reindeer herds were small and reindeer were used for transportation. Whereas this strategy was shared by Tundra Enetses, after having fallen under cultural pressure from Tundra Nenets, the Tundra Enetses specialized in reindeer breeding similar to their neighbors', relying on larger herds (Tikhonova 2005: 494-495). This main difference in traditional subsistence led Soviet ethnologists to compare Forest Enetses with Forest Nenetses and Tundra Enetses with Tundra Nenetses (e.g. Vasil'ev 1963). Nowadays, subsistence hunting and

fishing is the main source of irregular income for the inhabitants of Potapovo, as apparently 70-80 % of the working population in Potapovo is unemployed and lives on government aid (FN).

1.1. Enetses on the Taimyr Peninsula – official data and their reliability

Demographic data on Enetses has been messy throughout most of the 20th century and is actually of little help. It is not my intention to comment on these numbers in detail again and I restrict myself to a condensed overview of official data for my purposes here.⁵

Official Russian statistics treat Enetses as a unified people. The all-Russian census in 2002 counted 237 Enetses and this number did not differ too much from the data of the last Soviet census from 1989, which counted 209. Enetses were counted only twice during the Soviet period, aside from 1989, first in the 1926/27 census. They were not counted in either the 1959 or the 1979 censuses. In the 1926/1927 census Enetses were counted, but by that time Enetses were still called Yenisei-Samoyeds and in recent years the 1926/1927 census' results of 378 individuals has been abandoned in favor of now 482 individuals (see Vasil'ev et al 2005).

For almost half a century, a people called Enetses did not exist officially in the USSR, but interestingly on the okrug level, Enetses were apparently officially present since at least the 1960s. The fact that Enetses were missing in the 1959 and 1979 Soviet censuses collides with another interesting detail: the ethnonym 'Enets' has not evolved autonomously among the Enetses, but was invented by the Soviet ethnologist and linguist G. N. Prokof'ev in the 1930s. Apparently the new ethnonym was unknown among the Enetses at least until the 1960s. They stuck to their old practice of referring to themselves by either clan names or by calling themselves simply Nenetses or Nganasans.⁶

⁵ This was done in Siegl 2005.

⁶ In Siegl (forthcoming) I try to show that a missing literacy program for Enets might have been responsible for the late spreading of the newly imposed identity. If literacy and the accompanying red primers had been available

Paradoxically, official censuses and okrug statistics present, and apparently always presented, a different picture. Although okrug statistics, too, treat Enetses as a unified people, their official numbers are much smaller in comparison to the 1989/2002 censuses. For 2005, only 148 Enetses were registered and surprisingly the majority of Enetses are registered in Tukhart (57) followed by Vorontsovo (44), Dudinka (24) and Potapovo (12).⁷

At the lowest level of official representation, local statistics for Enetses exist of course in the village administration of Potapovo. For 2006, 12 Enetses were registered, but as many Enetses are descendants of marriages between Forest Enetses and Tundra Nenetses, several instances of “flexible ethnicity” were reported by local authorities in Potapovo. In practice this means that some Enetses change their ethnic heritage (ru: национальность) frequently, registering once as Enets, then as (Tundra) Nenets and again as Enets. As there are no obvious benefits connected with the choice of either ethnicity, this choice must be considered to be personal.⁸ (FN)

The only conclusions that can safely be drawn from official data can be subsumed as follows. First, although on ethnological (at least historically) and linguistic grounds Forest Enetses and Tundra Enetses differ quite fundamentally from each other, this separation has not made its way into official statistics.⁹ Second, both census data and

in the 1930s, the new identity might have spread more easily. However, Forest Enets was one of the few languages of Siberia which did not receive a literacy program in the early 1930s and the first serious attempts to create literacy for Forest Enets started as late as the 1990s. For Tundra Enets even this process has not yet started and probably will never start.

⁷ The remaining Enetses are registered in other villages (not mentioned here) live as peripheral minorities (not more than several individuals) in other villages on the Taimyr Peninsula. That data derives from a document provided by local authorities in Dudinka (Dannye).

⁸ As a rather extreme example, a teenage girl in Potapovo was registered as Enets in the 2002 census although the last Enets in her family was her grandfather (FN).

⁹ It is of course highly questionable whether such a distinction for a numerically small group of people would indeed be justifiable. Even in the

official okrug statistics have nothing to say on the number of speakers of Tundra Enets and Forest Enets, with respect to their linguistic competence, as they are treated as one language.

1.2. Forest Enetses in Dudinka

During my stay in Dudinka (22.11.-12.12.06 and 22.2.-19.4.07) I met and worked with several Forest Enetses of whom Zoja Nikolaevna Bol'ina must be especially mentioned. She assisted me in my work almost daily, for which I am very grateful.¹⁰

Whereas I have first hand evidence of six fluent speakers of Forest Enets in Dudinka, there are at least three more speakers of whom I have heard, but nothing can be said about their competence as I did not get to meet them. Interestingly, all Forest Enets speakers in Dudinka are women and among them there are two bilingual speakers who are descendants of a mixed Forest Enets – Tundra Nenets marriage (father Forest Enets, mother Tundra Nenets) and both have a clear preference for Tundra Nenets. The youngest speaker of Forest Enets in Dudinka is 46 years old and until 2003 she was working for the Enets program (*Enetskaja redaktsija*) at the local radio station before the program was closed.

Speakers of Forest Enets in Dudinka meet irregularly and most probably do not use their language more than once or twice a week. Not all speakers of Forest Enets in Dudinka are married and those who have married have spouses from different nationalities and to my knowledge no child has acquired Forest Enets even passively.

1.3. Forest Enets in Potapovo

The linguistic situation in Potapovo is unique within the boundaries of the *Taimyrskij Dolgano-Nenetskij munitsipal'nij rajon* and complex, so I have to restrict myself to mostly superficial comments.

case of the numerically more prominent Nenetses this same argument has not been applied officially.

¹⁰ The Diaspora judges Zoja to be the best speaker of the language in Dudinka, which turned out to be true.

In 2006, Potapovo had 410 inhabitants, of which about 240 were registered officially as indigenous (FN). Curiously, in Potapovo reside members from all five minority peoples of the Taimyr (Enetses, Evenkis, Dolgans, Nganasans and Nenetses) and as far as I know this is the only village of its kind on the Taimyr Peninsula. Also the deportation history of the Taimyr Peninsula has left its inevitable traces in Potapovo. Apart from the usual newcomers during the Soviet Period (Russian, Byelorussians, Ukrainians), descendants from deported Volga Germans, Latvians and Ingrians live in Potapovo. Several Selkups also reside in the area, and in the recent past a handful of Komis and several Koreans arrived there. Although officially around ten different nationalities are registered in Potapovo, historical evidence suggests at least 17 different nationalities have been present, especially since many are registered simply as Russians.¹¹

The outcome of this multinational situation is not unexpected. Individuals native to Potapovo and younger than 40 years of age – regardless of ethnic background – are monolingual in Russian and do not have even a passive command of their heritage language; knowledge of any language different than Russian is limited to the generation over 45.

Officially, only twelve Forest Enetses are registered in Potapovo; descendants from mixed Forest Enets and Tundra Nenets marriages are usually registered as Nenetses. Leaving the official data behind, there are about 20 speakers of Forest Enetses left in Potapovo whose command of the language varies greatly.

The sociolinguistic situation in Potapovo does not differ too much from Dudinka. The youngest speaker of Forest Enets in Potapovo is 44 years old, but, as she is a descendant from a mixed Tundra Nenets and Forest Enets marriage, she (as her elder sisters in Dudinka) has a clear preference for Tundra Nenets. The oldest L1 speakers are a couple of Forest Enetses (aged 61 and 60) who are also the only remaining Forest Enets marriage¹², though they no longer use the language

¹¹ This topic has been addressed by Krivonogov and will be dealt with later.

¹² As far as I know, there was only one other marriage among Forest Enetses; all other Forest Enetses who are now in the generation of last spea-

at home. As far as I know, two Tundra Nenetses, both over 80, have some command of Forest Enets.¹³

Whereas numerically around 20 speakers remain in Potapovo, the language is functionally extinct as it is no longer used and apparently has been functionally extinct for at least a decade. During my stay in Potapovo (12.12.06 – 22.02.2007), I did not encounter nor hear a single conversation in Forest Enets, nor did Forest Enetses visit each other for a chat. Also, when meeting in the post office, the administration, the hospital, the local store or on the street, Forest Enetses speak Russian among themselves.

2. HOW FOREST ENETS BECAME AN ENDANGERED LANGUAGE – A TENTATIVE RECONSTRUCTION

The decline of Forest Enets as a living language is tightly interwoven with the history of Potapovo in the 20th century. Whereas the village's history until the early 1960s was dealt with by Vasil'ev (1963)¹⁴, nothing comparable for the period 1960-2007 exists. Events in this period are reconstructed from my fieldnotes.¹⁵

kers married exogamically with members from other nationalities, which resulted in Russian dominated households and monolingual children. A Forest Enets in Dudinka told me that there is at least one new Forest Enets marriage, but I exclude it here as neither of the spouses has any command of its heritage language.

¹³ I could only meet one of them and she does not qualify as a L1 speaker. As she was married to a Forest Enets, she was exposed to the language during her marriage. After her husband's death, however, she had no chance to speak the language at all as her children acquired only Tundra Nenets. Interestingly, her daughter who is living with her mother told me that since the 1990s several Russian linguists have recorded her mother speaking Forest Enets. It might be possible that this old lady's Forest Enets skill was better earlier, but during my stay she was not capable of producing more than 2-3 sentences in Forest Enets before she switched to Tundra Nenets. According to my Forest Enets consultants however, this used to be the way she spoke Forest Enets and therefore they preferred to speak Tundra Nenets with her.

¹⁴ All of my Forest Enets consultants were born in the period which Vasil'ev describes in his seminal paper on Forest Enets ethnology. Many

The history of Potapovo itself is little known and for times before the 20th century only vague information exists. The official date of foundation has more political spirit than historical relevance: *“In 1881 a merchant from Krasnoiarsk called Aleksandr Ivanov built a winter camp at this place which would become Potapovo in later years. This merchant was said to be greedy and was not loved by the indigenous population of the area. In 1886, a revolutionary called Potapov was exiled from St. Petersburg to this location, which yet had no name. This brave revolutionary became a good friend of the indigenous population by offering them practical help. This revolutionary promised them a better life after the end of the Czarist period, which soon would come. This was seen as a worthy enterprise and due to his visions and his goodness the indigenous population called the yet unnamed place after the revolutionary Potapovo and not after the merchant....”* (Istorija)

Also many details in Vasil’ev’s account for the period prior to the Second World War are politically biased and are of no direct importance for the argumentation of this paper.

It is, however, safe to assume that until the Second World War, the immediate surroundings of Potapovo were still inhabited mainly by Forest Enetses and Tundra Nenetses as the majority of place names around Potapovo usually have their own names in both languages.¹⁶ Potapovo itself consisted of a handful of houses and the village population must have been entirely made up by Russians.

Concerning the immediate history of Potapovo, the following dates are of importance. The early 1930s saw the opening of the first kol-

details presented by Vasil’ev came up independently in the narrations of consultants which back up Vasil’ev’s account. As Forest Enetses have never been the subject of a classic ethnological monograph like its neighbors, Vasil’ev 1963 remains the most important source up till now.

¹⁵ The reconstruction presented in this chapter is based on fieldnotes, discussions with various inhabitants, and stories I recorded in Forest Enets about the area’s history as well as Istorija and Vasil’ev (1963). The account is by no means comprehensive but adequate enough for my purposes.

¹⁶ Also some Evenki families inhabited this area, but these families lived exclusively on the right side of the Yenisei south and east of Potapovo towards Khantajskoe ozero.

khozes¹⁷ and a primary school which first served Russian children only and later was opened to everybody. In 1935, a *kult-baza*¹⁸ was opened which was followed by a first aid point. The most decisive demographic impulses for Potapovo, however, happened during and after the Second World War. In 1942, a larger number of Volga Germans and Finns from the Leningrad oblast¹⁹ were deported to Potapovo and many locals insist that only after the arrival of the deportees did the village actually start to exist.

In 1950, regular flight service from the district capital Dudinka to Potapovo started to operate twice a week and this improved transportation, offering safer and quicker transportation all year-round (Istorija)²⁰. Around the same time, the next wave of deportees, now mainly from the Baltics, arrived in Potapovo.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the politics of closing non-perspective villages throughout the USSR affected the immediate surroundings of Potapovo. Two nearby villages, Nikol'sk and Khantaika, were closed and their inhabitants (mainly Volga Germans and Russians) were resettled in Potapovo.²¹

¹⁷ Collectivization on the Taimyr Peninsula was a process that differed greatly regionally. Whereas Forest Enetses, Nenetses and Evenkis around Potapovo embraced Soviet power eagerly and early, other more remote areas of the Taimyr Peninsula resisted until the late 1930s, especially those areas affected by the Taimyr uprising (Spisok).

¹⁸ Cultural-base for cultural-political agitation.

¹⁹ These Finns were most probably Ingrians. The last "Finn" by the surname Karhu was transferred to the hospital in Dudinka shortly before I arrived to Potapovo. For a superb collection of life stories of deportees see Svecha pamjati (2006).

²⁰ The Yenisei around Potapovo is frozen for almost 8 months allowing transport by boat only from June to late September.

²¹ Nikol'sk was located half way between Dudinka and Potapovo on the right shore of the Yenisei, Khantaika 30 km south of Potapovo (see the map in Vasil'ev 1963). Although around both villages Forest Enetses lived in the tundra it seems that the Forest Enets population around Nikol'sk was more prominent (FN). As both villages were small, the local newspaper Sovietskii Taimyr has sparse notes on them but at least Razuvaev (1946) has a short

Some time after the end of the Second World War, a fur farm and a dairy farm were opened in Potapovo. As a result of Soviet policy, colonists from the Ukraine, Byelorussia and other parts of the USSR arrived. There were also several reindeer brigades in the tundra around Potapovo, though it seems that such brigades existed already before the war.²²

In the early 1960s, Komi reindeer brigades transferred several thousand reindeer from the Yamal Peninsula to reindeer brigades around Potapovo. As local capacities could no longer cope with these new huge brigades, several Dolgan reindeer herders together with their families came from the eastern parts of the okrug (Khatanga rajon) to Potapovo. Eventually several of the Komi reindeer herders (who transferred the herds) decided to settle in Potapovo.²³ At the end of the 1960s, Potapovo had a population of approximately 500 inhabitants – a figure that remained stable until the end of the 1980s.

Although Potapovo served as an administrative anchor, not every registered inhabitant lived in the village. Vasil'ev (1963) clearly states that in the late 1950s the indigenous population usually lived in the tundra and only once a while came to the village to acquire supplies and to visit their children in the local boarding school.²⁴ However, as Vasil'ev noted, several indigenous families were awarded apartments

comment on the Kolkhoz Kirov at Nikol'sk, mentioning several Forest Enetses, Tundra Nenetses and Evenkis.

²² For as long as my Forest Enets consultants could remember, there were four brigades around Potapovo, three on the right and one on the left side of the Yenisei.

²³ One of my central consultants, a retired Forest Enets reindeer herder who witnessed the transfer as a young boy, claimed that the Komi reindeer herders were given a five-year contract in Potapovo, but after the expiry of the contracts, the majority of them returned to the Yamal. Eva Toulouze (p.c.) suggested that my consultants might have talked about the Yamal politically rather than geographically and that these reindeer breeders could have come from the Southern districts of the Yamal autonomous region but not from the Yamal Peninsula per se. This question has to be further investigated during upcoming fieldwork.

²⁴ Almost all my consultants were at Potapovo's boarding school in this period and confirmed Vasil'ev's account.

in newly built houses based on their productivity, which was intended to make the nomads permanent residents of Potapovo.

In the 1960s, the ethnic map of Potapovo was far more colorful than in most other areas of Siberia, but this point was mentioned only in passing by Vasil'ev (1963).²⁵ As discourse on ethnicity is a prominent topic in Potapovo, it is not too difficult to obtain a sketch on the ethnic situation during this period. As I was not shown official statistics by the village administration, the ranking of individual nationalities is based on accounts of my language consultants (which were nonetheless quite uniform).²⁶

Ethnic map of Potapovo in the early 1960s

Major nationalities	Russians, Volga Germans, Forest Enetses, Tundra Nenetses, Evenkis
Minor nationalities (usually not more than one to three families or several individuals)	Finns (Ingrians), Selkups, Koreans, Komis, Nganasans, Dolgans, Byelorussians, Ukrainians, Latvians, Chuvashs, Tatars, Lithuanians (?), Estonians (?) ²⁷

By looking at the table above one can clearly see that Potapovo hosted a wide variety of nationalities since the 1950s and this inevi-

²⁵ Probably Vasil'ev avoided a clear statement because this would have led him to mention Potapovo's close ties with deportation politics which apparently was not appropriate during these years.

²⁶ After one of these instances when I went through the former nationalities in Potapovo with one of my consultants he concluded with a joke that *we never had any Japanese in our village but who knows what the future brings*.

²⁷ The probably last German speaking deportee still alive served me many times as a crucial informant in rechecking local accounts on ethnicity and local history. This man, usually called Uncle Sasha, arrived in Potapovo in 1942 at the age of 17 and is now among the oldest local inhabitants. What makes his role unique is that he lived after deportation constantly in the village (contrary to the local indigenous population) and he has witnessed the period in question as an eye-witness. Whereas no consultant brought up any Estonian deportees, this old man independently told me once, while referring to my personal history (that I'm a German who lives in Estonia), that also several Estonians were temporarily living in Potapovo in the 1950s.

tably had an impact on the sociolinguistic situation. Whereas in the first half of the 20th century Tundra Nenets dominated the tundra around Potapovo as a lingua franca, the influx of non-locals with different linguistic backgrounds created the need for a new means of communication. The rise of Russian as a new lingua franca was therefore only a result of social and socio-economical changes and deportations accompanying life in Potapovo after the Second World War.²⁸

2.1. Assimilation and homogenization in Potapovo

After the Second World War, Potapovo was in need of a new lingua franca. Whereas this was inevitable in a village whose inhabitants spoke a variety of languages which were mutually not intelligible, the rise of Russian resulted in the extinction of all the other languages, whether the indigenous (or heritage) languages of deportees or those of newcomers. Nowadays, Potapovo is functionally monolingual, and active command of any language other than Russian can be found only in the generation over 45, which owing to social problems, alcoholism and bad health care dwindles quickly.²⁹

Concerning the decline of Forest Enets in and around Potapovo I argue that at least three factors have contributed extensively to this setting, namely the boarding school, loss of marriage rules and new interethnic marriages and finally the new way of Soviet living.³⁰

²⁸ When comparing the situation in Potapovo with stories from other areas of the Taimyr, it seems that Russian started to dominate in Potapovo much earlier than in other parts of the Taimyr Peninsula.

²⁹ There seems to be however one exception. It is generally agreed that Evenki as a spoken language in Potapovo was already extinct in the late 1970s. Also German is no longer spoken in Potapovo since the 1990s, as many Volga-Germans left to Germany (FN).

³⁰ It is perhaps needless to say that these processes were not limited exclusively to Potapovo. As literature dealing with these and relating problems has become quite extensive, I refer to Vakhtin 2001 for a general overview.

2.1.1. The role of the boarding school

Although a primary school was opened in Potapovo in the late 1920s, it was initially reserved for Russian children before indigenous children were finally admitted in the 1930s. In 1960, 101 children went to the local school; 47 of them were from indigenous minorities and lived permanently in the boarding school (Vasil'ev 1963: 65).

Usually native children did not know any Russian at all when entering the boarding school.³¹ The same holds for many Volga Germans who did not yet speak Russian (or spoke it poorly) when they came to Potapovo. Concerning the Germans, already the first generation born in Potapovo was said to have switched entirely to Russian.³² All native children spent the next years mainly in the boarding school, in which, as elsewhere in the Soviet North, the use of native languages was prohibited. Although these children still spent their short summer vacation in the tundra, native language skills started to dwindle significantly.³³

Instruction in the school was in Russian, and although for Tundra Nenets and Evenki teaching materials for primary and secondary schools did exist, no native language was ever taught in the boarding school in Potapovo during the Soviet Period. Whereas the school still

³¹ All my consultants are principally from this generation and confirmed that they did not speak any Russian before entering school. Apparently, their generation was also the last.

³² Many older residents (regardless of ethnical background) told me that my way of speaking Russian reminded them of the way the Volga Germans spoke Russian in Potapovo, but almost all conversations ended with the statement that their children already spoke Russian like Russians. Nowadays, there seems to be only one fluent speaker of German alive (mentioned in a footnote above). The fact that German was given up so quickly might be connectable to deportation traumas and the overall wish to become as soon as possible accepted as Russians.

³³ Again, most of my consultants reported that teachers instructed their parents to talk to their children in Russian during their vacation, but this was apparently not followed.

operates, it was cut down to an 8-year school and lost the boarding school part several years ago (FN).³⁴

2.1.2. Loss of marriage rules and new interethnic marriages

Rules for marriages were described largely by Dolgikh (1962: 221-224) and for periods prior to extensive contact with other nationalities, a clear preference for intra- Forest Enets marriages or marriages between Forest Enetses and Tundra Nenetses can be postulated. Marriages between Tundra Nenetses and Forest Enetses, however, resulted usually in the dominance of Tundra Nenets which accelerated the decline in Forest Enets speakers during the early 20th century. There are however hints that marriage rules as documented by Dolgikh with preference for exogamy might not be as old as they seem³⁵ and the reasons for a readjustment of marriage rules might be found in the 19th century. Enets and Tundra Nenets folklore contain memories about earlier wars between themselves which took place sometime in the 19th century, when Tundra Nenetses expanded their pastures from the Yamal Peninsula further east to the Taimyr (Vasil'ev 1963, Golovnev 2000). This warfare and several epidemics³⁶ severely decimated the Forest Enets population and these must have left some traces in marriage rules. The generation of the last Forest Enets speakers was still born in either monolingual Forest Enets or bilingual Forest Enets Tundra Nenets families.³⁷ This pattern abruptly ended in the 1960s

³⁴ This step affected several families who still preferred to live in the tundra by that time and forced them to settle permanently in Potapovo to take care of their children.

³⁵ At least in an early article, Dolgikh explores the possibility that an earlier existing endogamy might not have been preserved (1946: 111), though as far as I know he did not mention this idea in his later works.

³⁶ The last dramatic flu epidemic raged in the tundra around Potapovo in 1927 killing about 1/3 of the Enets population (Vasil'ev 1963: 64).

³⁷ Neither Dolgikh (1962) nor Vasil'ev (1963) reported any other marriages for the first half of the 20th century, and no Forest Enets in Potapovo could recall any diverging marriages in earlier periods. I have heard rumors of a mixed Forest Enets – Evenki marriage in Nikol'sk but this could neither be falsified nor verified. Otherwise at least two cases from the early 20th

and in the generation of the last fluent speakers of Forest Enets only two Enets marriages can be documented. Other marriages resulted in new constellations (e.g. marriages with Russians, Ukrainians, Dolgans, Evenkis, Komis), but surprisingly among the last fluent speakers, many of them had never married at all. Children born into such marriages were raised monolingually in Russian³⁸, whereas children from Forest Enets marriages at least have some – albeit very limited – passive language skills. Practically speaking, the current generation entered the local school monolingual.³⁹

2.1.3. *New ways of living*

The new way of living outside the tundra opened a whole new variety of possible professions. Whereas the overall role of higher education at the Herzen Institute in Leningrad was apparently of marginal importance for Forest Enetses⁴⁰, a local *uchilishche* such as in nearby Igarka or a *tekhnikum*⁴¹ in Dudinka offered new educations, which meant life away from one's speech community for a longer period, and several Enetses actually ended up in other areas on the Taimyr (and elsewhere in the Soviet Union/Russia) where Enets is not spoken⁴². Additionally, for men service in the Red Army prolonged a

century are known as children from a short-term liaison between a Russian and Forest Enets women were born, but these children were apparently reared in later Samoyedic intermarriages (FN).

³⁸ I have no evidence that non-Enets spouses would have learned Forest Enets.

³⁹ Several older schoolteachers in Potapovo confirmed that the last children who still knew another language beside Russian or no Russian at all entered the school about 35 years ago (FN).

⁴⁰ So far I am aware of four Forest Enetses who have studied at the Herzen Institute at various points during the 20th century. The number of Enetses who had studied in Igarka seems to be higher but I lack concrete numbers.

⁴¹ *Uchilishche* and *tehnikum* were college-like institutions which offered specialist instruction at secondary level.

⁴² I have evidence for three Forest Enets ladies who live in Khatanga, Krasnoiarisk and Moscow.

stay in a Russian speaking community (by that time three years), as they were sent as far away as Eastern Germany or Kamchatka. Whereas the stereotype I rely here might be too naïve, the generations educated in boarding schools continued their education according to Soviet ideology in new spheres of living, where the language of the tundra was not deemed appropriate (cf. Pika 1999: 123-132).

2.2. The outcome of assimilation

“When I came to Potapovo about 30 years ago from the Altai I still recall that people dressed in native clothes. The Evenki malitsas (traditional fur coats F.S.) are still on my mind as they were so colorful and people wearing them almost resembled dolls. But nowadays nobody wears any malitsas in the village. We all look the same now.”

This quote from a woman working in the local administration neatly subsumes the assimilation processes which took place in Potapovo. When walking through Potapovo, either camouflage or worn out working clothing from *Noril'skij Nikkel'* dominates. Sometimes Russian fur coats can be seen, but of the permanent residents of Potapovo only two men, a retired Forest Enets reindeer breeder and a middle-aged Nenets, wear malitsas. Even there, after a closer look they turned out to be made of cloth and not of fur. Beside these two men, ethnicity is no longer visually shown.⁴³

During my stay in the village I heard only one conversation in Tundra Nenets on the street and during a quarrel among a drunken Forest Enets and a close relative some sentences were uttered in Forest Enets. Once and a while some elder inhabitants might utter a greeting in their native language when entering the local store, but also this seldom occurs. Principally no language other than Russian is used openly in the village.

For other residents who are not native to Potapovo, this situation is unusual. A young Dolgan man who married a girl from Potapovo,

⁴³ In late January several reindeer breeders from the last intact reindeer brigade came to Potapovo to restock their supplies and in these days malitsas could be seen in the village. Similar observations are reported from other areas of the Taimyr Peninsula too.

now a permanent resident of the village told me that for him this village is still a mystery. *“In the Khatanga rajon where I come from we all speak Dolgan and you hear Dolgan everywhere. Dolgans usually marry Dolgans but this is no longer as strict as it was during the Soviet period. But look here, you can marry who you want, and everyone speaks only Russian.”*⁴⁴

Whereas many criticize the process of assimilation (especially my language consultants), it is usually understood as an inescapable process in Potapovo over the last 50 years. It is generally agreed among the Forest Enetses that whatever language they speak in the village, Enetses will be still around in Potapovo in the future, albeit the fact that they won't speak the language. This point is also shared by the Enetses living in Dudinka and statements like *whereas the language is dying, the people who feel themselves Enetses remain* could be heard frequently. These sentiments, however, mean that the concept of being a (Forest) Enets has already been reshaped or at least is under reshaping. The concept of language as a central factor of identity was stressed by all of my consultants who still spoke the language and saw competence in Forest Enets as the most decisive factor for ethnical classification.⁴⁵

2.3. Geography for good and worse

Zoja Bol'ina once remarked that to a certain degree, the geographic location of Potapovo has also contributed to the extinction of Forest Enets. *Whereas usually villages on the Taimyr Peninsula do not have more than three to five different peoples living in a village, the situation in Potapovo is quite different. Potapovo is comparatively accessible due to its location on the shore of the Yenisei, not too far away from Dudinka and precisely this fact has made the influx of other nationalities much easier than elsewhere.*

⁴⁴ Unfortunately I could not find out the nationality of his wife.

⁴⁵ It is perhaps worthwhile mentioning that their classification is flawed, as the generation of last speakers is far from being homogenous, as many Forest Enets speakers are descendants of mixed marriages and actually bilingual.

Later residents of Potapovo focused on the importance of its geographic location as well. Concerning history, this accessibility is seen as the major source of multi-ethnicity and many people regardless of ethnic background agree that this is the major fact which has contributed to this distinctive social and linguistic situation in the village.⁴⁶

Concerning the present situation, the location on the Yenisei is seen as big advantage. Air transportation which receives less and less local subsidy results in astronomic prices for rides with antiquated Mi-8 helicopters. For instance, a one-way helicopter ride from Dudinka to Volochanka (about 400 km to the East of Dudinka) equals the price of a one-way ticket from Noril'sk to Moscow (around 3000 km). A helicopter ride from Dudinka to Potapovo was 2734 RUB in December 2006⁴⁷ and many locals use snowmobiles for a short visit to Dudinka when necessary in winter.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ While introducing myself and my research plans to the local infrastructure in the beginning of my stay, I frequently encountered people who were eager to stress that they too had some Enets or Volga German ancestors. Concerning this, I did not make a list of these encounters but while scrolling my notebooks and my memory, there were more than a dozen of these encounters. By simply adding these encounters to the numbers of registered Enetses and speakers of the language one arrives easily at a number of Enetses which clearly outnumbers official statistics. This somehow hints to the works of the Russian sociologist Krivonogov who has claimed, that actually 96 Enetses resided in Potapovo (Krivonogov 1998, 2001). Whereas I consider this number much too high, one should get the point that official ethnicity, which does not allow more than one ethnicity, stands in sharp contrast with what inhabitants in Potapovo understand as ethnic heritage.

⁴⁷ When the ice on the Yenisei and on Lake Khantajka is thick enough, helicopters are replaced by small AN-3 aircrafts which offer cheaper flights. This service, principally operating on a weekly basis – but of course weather dependant – temporarily eases transportation problems. Still, this service is restricted to a later period of winter, and usually does not start earlier than February and lasts only until April.

⁴⁸ This is even more understandable as one might sit stuck in Dudinka for a long period before regular transportation becomes available. Having one's own transportation with a snow mobile clearly enhances mobility. For the 2006-2007 season, helicopter rides to Potapovo and Khantaiskoe ozero were scheduled for every 1st and 3rd Tuesday, but only if enough passengers were

The prices in the local store in Potapovo are comparatively low as it can be supplied by *vesdekhods*⁴⁹ from Dudinka. On the contrary, the local store in the neighboring village Khantajskoe Ozero, 80 km south-east of Potapovo (the field site of Anderson 2000), has to rely largely on air transport for supplying and people in Potapovo wonder about the high prices they hear about from Khantajskoe Ozero and other villages on the Taimyr.

3. FOREST ENETS AS A MORIBUND LANGUAGE – LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE AND LANGUAGE DECAY

Summing up the socio-linguistic situation of Forest Enets, it is unfortunately safe to conclude that the language is moribund and on the brink of extinction. Against demographic trends among the indigenous peoples of the Russian North and Far East as sketched by Pika (1999), it is only a question of one or two decades before the language is gone forever. As the Forest Enets generation 20-40 has only very limited passive skills (if at all), the loss of the language will be ultimate and abrupt⁵⁰.

The fact that the language is out of use and on the way to its extinction divides speakers of Forest Enets into two fractions. Whereas the majority of Forest Enetses in Potapovo seemed not to care at all that the language will be gone soon, there are some Forest Enetses who, as the Diaspora in Dudinka, welcomed my engagement to preserve the language to show *that once a language called onai bađa was*

available. When this was not to be achieved, travels were postponed for a week for another try. In my case I had to wait for three consecutive Tuesdays before a trip was finally made. A nice example for private mobility could be obtained some days before Christmas in late December 2006 when a convoy of 13 snow mobiles left for Dudinka to buy presents and to bring some fuel.

⁴⁹ Tank like all-terrain vehicle.

⁵⁰ It seems that two young men both around 27-30 years of age have a somehow better passive language skill, but both frankly admitted that albeit they understand some Forest Enets and understand most of what their mother says, they are not capable of answering in Forest Enets.

*spoken in Potapovo*⁵¹. Whereas the overall number of speakers of Forest Enets I could identify is somewhere around 20, I found only five speakers who were capable and reliable enough to work with me on a more or less regular basis.⁵²

Elicitation and translation tasks were usually not problematic, but producing spontaneous narratives turned out to be a serious problem for almost everyone in the beginning. In the later phase of my stay in Potapovo as my consultants reactivated much of their language skills due to my frequent visits, their speech flow became more natural, reducing false starts and disfluencies significantly. Still, everybody frankly admitted that contemporary Forest Enets differs much from the language of their parents. Comments such as *my mother would not have said this like I did but I can't recall how she did* or *if our old people were still alive they would tell you hours and hours, but we don't even remember their stories in Russian* could be heard almost daily. These statements find confirmation in my recordings. I recorded 75 narratives (roughly equaling four hours of spoken Forest Enets), of which more than 60 percent are personal or historical⁵³ narratives followed by retranslation of Tundra Enets narratives (via their Russian translations); fairy tales, legends or stories about old religious believes are clearly marginal in my collection.

⁵¹ For several Forest Enetses who were not too eager to work with me initially, this became a major argument later.

⁵² Most of my Forest Enets informants are officially retired, but their pension is small and is needed to support close relatives. As in other areas of the Russian Federation, chronic alcoholic abuse is a general problem in Potapovo too (regardless of ethnic background) and after pay day there is not the faintest chance to find a sober informant for as long as (s)he has not run out of money.

⁵³ Under the notion of historical narratives I subsume stories about life in earlier days, place names or events connectable to Potapovo.

3.1. Forest Enets language maintenance – what native speakers think about linguists

Nowadays, the Forest Enets intelligentsia in Dudinka wonders why there are so few primary materials published, despite the fact that almost all Forest Enetses alive have been serving as consultants for linguists and ethnologists in and around Potapovo or Dudinka.⁵⁴ According to them, they have received almost nothing in return which would have assisted them in compiling materials for language revitalization which the Forest Enets community has been trying since the early 1990s (see Siegl forthcoming). The former practice of doing fieldwork for the sake of science is a concept antiquated by now; language endangerment which threatens linguistic diversity globally has resulted in the emancipation of native speakers who no longer see themselves as “something” to be studied. Whereas this trend has started in other parts of the world already in the late 1970s, this understanding has emerged independently among the Forest Enetses. Nowadays one has to justify one’s work (which I had to do almost permanently in the beginning of my active work with Forest Enetses since early 2006) and speakers of endangered languages have become critics of scientific practice. A central consultant of mine in Potapovo initially asked me why she should tell me “*the old stories again as everything I know or found worth to tell I have told many times to...*” which was followed by a list of researchers. When I tried to explain her that almost nothing has been published which was my decision to get started with Forest Enets she asked me frankly why this has happened. “*Isn’t this something you have to do? Isn’t this part of your work?*”

Whereas such behavior could arise in the Russian Federation only after the collapse of communistic power, parallels are known from the experiences of other linguists reported before the overall topic language endangerment became widely known:

⁵⁴ The current generation of Forest Enetses has worked actively with I. Sorokina, Ja. Glukhij, E. Helimski, K. Labanauskas and V. Vasil’ev, although apparently no longer with either B. Dolgikh or N. Tereshchenko.

“I would also like to express the hope that more effort might be put into producing dictionaries of Australian languages than has been case to date. Although many fieldworkers (including Bible translators and literacy personnel) have extensive lexical files, the number of adequate published dictionaries is scandalously low. [...] In particular, ‘the academic’ linguists have essentially contented themselves with long grammatical studies, squeezing out ‘theoretical’ conclusions of various sorts, and have as yet published few or no texts and no adequate dictionaries. I suspect that the next generation of linguists, not to mention the Aboriginals themselves, will judge their predecessors harshly for this behaviour, which not only renders meaningless the linguists’ professions of providing support for Aboriginals but is also self-defeating even for purposes of theoretical analysis.” (Heath 1982 IX)

In the Forest Enets case, linguists are already judged harshly for their behavior and part of my stay in Dudinka and Potapovo was dedicated to regaining more understanding for my work and reconciling the Forest Enets intelligentsia with linguistics and social anthropology. During a public lecture in early March 2007 in Dudinka, I symbolically returned my findings to the gathered Forest Enets intelligentsia by giving each of them a set of five discs which contained all recorded stories I made during my fieldwork.⁵⁵ I also distributed copies of articles on Forest Enets language and culture which I had taken along to assist the Forest Enets community in their work on propagating and preserving their legacy. These two steps were highly appreciated not only by the Forest Enets intelligentsia, but also by representatives from other local indigenous minority languages who attended the lecture.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ As the remaining speech community is rather small and every speaker of Forest Enets is somehow related to every other, this symbolic present gave them the voices of their relatives and this gesture was highly appreciated.

⁵⁶ Whereas all these steps were meant to reconcile the Forest Enets community with the linguistics and anthropology community, I was nevertheless painfully aware that these efforts came about a generation too late.

3.2. Preserving the Forest Enets legacy⁵⁷

As mentioned above, the broadcast of a Forest Enets program on the local radio stopped in 2003 with the closing of *Enetskaja redaktsija*, which means that ever since Forest Enets is present only in the local newspaper *Taimyr*. Currently, a page of news and stories in Forest Enets are published once a month, usually compiled by Zoja Bol'ina.

For several years, the local *Dudinskij kolledž* has offered courses in Forest Enets language and culture taught by a native speaker, but the teacher retired in May 2007 and most probably the Forest Enets program will be closed as there is nobody who could continue her work. Unfortunately this program has not produced any L2 speakers.

Currently, Forest Enets is not taught in Potapovo⁵⁸ and although Forest Enets was compulsory at the local school for some years, as far as I can judge, nobody has acquired any practical skills in the language and most probably do not possess even a basic vocabulary.

4. WHY IS THE FATE OF FOREST ENETS EXTRAORDINARY AND FOR HOW LONG WILL THE LANGUAGE STILL BE SPOKEN?

Summing up the observations brought up in this article, the fate of Forest Enets as an endangered language has at least one extraordinary trait worth of discussing in more detail. As I tried to show in this paper, the fate of Forest Enets as a living language is entirely connected to the fate of a single village. Whereas until the 1950s two villages

⁵⁷ This adds some more details to Siegl 2007.

⁵⁸ The former teacher of Forest Enets refused to meet me while I was working in the village as she was probably afraid to admit that she herself had no command of the language. As the teacher is an offspring of a Forest Enets Komi marriage, she was never exposed to the language as she grew up in a Russian speaking household and learned some Forest Enets as an adult at the *kolledž* in Dudinka (FN).

served as anchors for Forest Enetses, the closing of Nikol'sk focused Forest Enets life entirely on Potapovo⁵⁹.

With the influx of other nationalities, a process of cultural and linguistic assimilation started and in the course of only two generations the emergence of Soviet power under the stewardship of the new lingua franca Russian left no other language alive. The crucial difference, which makes the fate of Forest Enets so extraordinary, was the Forest Enetses dependence on Potapovo, both economically and socially.

Whereas other Taimyrian indigenous minority languages (Tundra Nenets, Dolgan and Nganasan), which are also functionally extinct in Potapovo, are nevertheless still spoken in other villages,⁶⁰ Forest Enets (which is only spoken in Potapovo) has lost this struggle and stands on the verge of extinction. As the last fluent generation of Forest Enetses is located demographically in the generation over 45 and active skills in the younger generation seem to be missing entirely, the linguistic fate of Forest Enets is obvious.⁶¹ Functionally the language has already been extinct for at least a decade and all attempts concerning revitalization have produced no results; children in Potapovo are unwilling to learn the language⁶² and have not acquired any reasonable

⁵⁹ Many Forest Enetses agreed with my assumption that if Nikol'sk were not closed in the late 1950s Forest Enets might be in a much better situation right now (FN).

⁶⁰ Apparently Taimyrian Evenki is in the same state as Forest Enets. This judgment is based on a short interview with the teacher of Evenki at the local *Taimyrskij kolledž*; unfortunately I could not cross-check this statement as I did not meet other Evenkis during my stay.

⁶¹ Predicting the future is something researchers in the humanities are not eager to try. Perhaps one of the best instances where linguists have predicated the death of language is the Yukaghir case. Since at least 1860, researchers were eager to stress that the language would be extinct in two generations, but there are still some speakers left in the 21st century and while Yukaghir is probably functionally extinct by now, the language lived much longer than it was expected. This argument has been exploited by Vakhtin in the discussion of language death several times during the last 15 years and has been recently subsumed by Vakhtin & Golovnov 2005: 127-129.

⁶² In recent years Forest Enets was compulsory for all school children regardless of ethnic background and was taught with German as a foreign

skills. Also the college program in Dudinka has not produce any new L2 speakers. Almost all Forest Enetses who served me as consultants did not see any obvious reason why one should revitalize the language and the sporadic attempts to teach the language at the local school from 1992 to 2007 were judged as unnecessary.

The only wish of the remaining Forest Enets speakers was that I should publish my results so that people will know that once a language called *onai baða* was spoken on the Taimyr Peninsula and that people could read what Enetses had on their mind, which turned out to be a major reason for working with me (FN).

5. CONCLUSION

Against general demographic trends in the Russian North as sketched by Pika (1999), one has to state that on statistical grounds the language will be gone forever in a decade or two. Contrary to Evans' experience of discovering the last speaker of a dying language for several times (Evans 2001), this is not likely to happen in the Forest Enets case. Although I most definitely could not identify all remaining speakers of Forest Enets I assume that I did identify all L1 speakers of Forest Enets during my stay. For this I partly relied on Forest Enets extended-kinship networks as the Forest Enetses themselves quite openly helped me in identifying other speakers. Their comments on linguistic competence in particular turned out to be very useful and generally precise. These accounts however disagree severely with Krivonogov's results gathered in the early 1990s (Krivonogov 1998, 2001). Whereas Krivonogov's statistics on "ethnic processes among Enetses" do indeed sketch the overall situation concerning assimilation trends quite well, his statistics on sociolinguistic matters seem much too high or even impossible. As Krivonogov relied exclusively on questionnaires (and quantitative methods) which were then reinter-

language. I personally doubt that this was a good decision, as against the multi-ethnic background of the village there were apparently many children who were forced to learn a language to which they had no immediate relationship at all.

preted against official data provided by local authorities⁶³ and only occasionally enhanced by qualitative methods, Krivonogov claimed that there were still several Enetses in the young and youngest generation who spoke Enets as L1 in the early 1990s. These speakers should have come to age by now, but unfortunately I did not encounter a single speaker in this generation nor did I hear anyone talking about such speakers. Whereas Krivonogov presented several statistics concerning language skills and language use separately for Vorontsovo and Potapovo, the data is usually lumped together which leaves little chance to get something more out of these numbers.⁶⁴ I therefore have to assume that Krivonogov, too, fell victim to the assumption that Enets is a unified language. Secondly, Krivonogov's claim that in the early 1990s that almost half of the Enets' population still spoke Enets as L1 also seems highly implausible. Concerning Potapovo, the last speaker of the "old generation" which contemporary Forest Enetses remember as the last full-fledged speaker of their language died in 2003. Many of the central consultants of Irina Sorokina and Kazys Labanauskas have died in the last years, but, honestly speaking, based on my work on Forest Enets genealogies (disguised by work on kinship terms) I'm not able to reconstruct that many speakers of Forest Enets to achieve a 50 % Enets speaking population 15 years ago.

This unfortunately confirms that the youngest speaker of Forest Enets is indeed 45 years old and, as all revitalization processes in

⁶³ The procedure was described to me by various officials in both Potapovo and Dudinka who have assisted Krivonogov during his fieldwork during the 1990s.

⁶⁴ As "speaking a language different from Russian" is a cultural construct deeply rooted in Russian discourse which differs from SAE concepts, I usually tested individuals by asking them questions in Forest Enets which is a much more productive means of testing language skills than an anonymously sent questionnaire which asks what languages a particular individual speaks. Due to my qualitative and small-scale approach within the community, it became quite obvious to me that Krivonogov's statistics should be understood as artifacts of social research methods paired with Foucaultian discourse on "language skills" but not as a more or less adequate reflection of current states.

Potapovo and Dudinka could not produce any new L2 speakers, the extinction of Forest Enets seems to be inevitable.

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RÉSUMÉS

La situation actuelle de l'enets des forêts sur la base de travaux de terrain récents

Le présent article fournit un aperçu de la situation actuelle de l'enets des forêts. Il est fondé sur les travaux de terrain réalisés par l'auteur dans la

péninsule de Taïmyr du 22 novembre 2006 au 19 avril 2007, travaux qui lui ont permis de collecter des matériaux sur cette langue samoyède du nord peu connue, ainsi que des données socio-anthropologiques aussi bien sur les Enets que sur les autres nationalités de la région. L'article décrit tout d'abord la situation actuelle de l'enets des forêts à Dudinka, la capitale du raïon municipal Dolgano-Nenets de Taïmyr, et dans le village de Potapovo, où résident la majorité des derniers locuteurs de cette langue. La deuxième partie fournit un bref aperçu de l'histoire récente de Potapovo, dont les conséquences ont conduit l'enets des forêts au bord de l'extinction. L'action ou l'inaction des précédents chercheurs qui ont travaillé sur cette langue fait aujourd'hui l'objet de critiques dans la génération des derniers locuteurs et notamment parmi les intellectuels enets des forêts. L'auteur soumet également à un examen critique les données socio-linguistiques rassemblées par V. Krivonogov au sujet des Enets. Il constate pour finir que l'enets des forêts est voué à une disparition rapide.

Metsaeenetsi keele hetkeseis hiljutiste välitööde põhjal

Käesolev artikkel annab ülevaate eenetsi keele hetkeseisust. Materjal pärineb autori välitöödelt Taimõri poolsaarel (22.11.06 - 19.4.07). Välitööde jooksul koguti ainekku vähe teada põhja-samojeedi keelest ja sotsio-antropoloogilisi andmeid nii eenetsite kui ka teiste Taimõri rahvaste kohta. Artikkel tutvustab metsaeenetsi keele hetkeseisu Taimõri Dolgaani-Neenetsi munitsipaalraiooni pealinnas Dudinkas ja ka külas Potapovo, kus elab enamik viimastest metsaeenetsi keele rääkijatest. Artikli teises osas antakse väike ülevaade Potapovo lähiajaloost, mille tagajärjed on viinud metsaeenetsi keele väljasuremise äärel. Sellega on seotud metsaeenetsi intelligentsi kriitiline hinnang varasemate teadlaste tegemistele ja tegemata jätmistele, mis on palju pahameelt tekitanud viimaste kõnelejate põlvkonnas. Kriitiliselt vaadatakse üle ka V. Krivonogovi kogutud sotsio-lingvistilised andmed eenetsite kohta. Artikkel lõpeb tõdemusega metsaeenetsi keele peatsest hääbumisest.