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Article abstract

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Yupik language teaching in Chukotka

Natalia (Qurangawen) Rodionova*

Résumé: Enseignement de la langue yupik en Tchoukotka

Ce texte décrit brièvement les différents cours en langue yupik qui sont offerts en Tchoukotka. L'auteure commente le matériel pédagogique qui y est présentement utilisé.

Abstract: Yupik language teaching in Chukotka

This text briefly describes the different Yupik language courses offered in Chukotka. The author also comments on the pedagogical material that is presently used.

Introduction

The linguistic situation (among the Yupik people in Chukotka) has changed dramatically in the last 30 to 50 years. During the 1950s and up to the 1970s, people still understood and spoke the Yupik language. Nowadays, rural Yupik people older than 30 still understand, but cannot speak, the Yupik language. Youth under 30 neither understand nor speak Yupik. Besides, the Yupik pupils cannot even pronounce some characteristic Yupik language sounds. In this context, teachers in the Chukchi and Yupik languages have to not only teach the Native languages but also write, approve, and publish educative materials adapted to the current language situation. There is an urgent need to prepare new educational materials for the learning of the Native language from the very beginning, as if it were a “foreign” language.

Today the Yupik language (Chaplinski dialect) teaching in Chukotka is carried out in two village schools in the Provideniya District (Sireniki, Novoe Chaplino) and in one school in the Iultin District (Uelkal), as well as at the Chukotka Multidisciplinary College, in the Region's capital of Anadyr. This paper describes the different Yupik

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language courses offered in Chukotka and the pedagogical materials (readings and teaching aids) that are presently used.

Courses offered

Both the Yupik (Siberian or Central Siberian Yupik) and the Chukchi languages have been taught in the college since its opening in 2003 under the following programs: “Our language and literature,” “Teaching in primary school,” and “Applied arts and national crafts.” Students can choose Native language courses as either mandatory or optional classes. Unfortunately, our college, as well as secondary schools in the villages of Chukotka, suffer from the lack of new Native language handbooks, and particularly Yupik language manuals. Yupik language teachers, students in village schools, pedagogical schools as well as in the multidisciplinary college are still doing classes with 30 or even 50 year-old manuals¹.

New pedagogical material

In 2004, I developed a new handbook entitled *Praktikum po eskimoskomu iazyku* (‘Eskimo language exercises’) as part of the project “Increasing Indigenous access in Siberia to high education” (Rodionova 2006) funded by the University of Novosibirsk. This handbook was produced for a practical course in Yupik language for beginners. As addition to it, in 2007 the Chukotka Multidisciplinary College published my textbook *Sbornik rasskazov russkikh pisatelei, perevedennykh na eskimoskii iazyk* (‘Russian writers translated in Eskimo language’)². Its overall aim is to help students to develop a good speech culture and literacy in general linguistics. One can find in it short stories and excerpts from Anton Chekhov, Lev Tolstoy, Konstantin Ushinskii, Elena Il’ina, Nikolai Nosov, Valentina Osseieva, Anatoly Panteleev, L. Voronkova, and Victor Suteev. The stories were translated in Yupik language by elders from the Yupik villages who are experts in Chaplinski and Imtuski (Imtuk) dialects³. This makes the textbook useful not only for the Yupik language classes but also for the course on “Dialectology” in the program “Our language and literature.” The textbook reflects

¹ Until recently the only teaching materials for the Yupik language program at the Chukotka Multidisciplinary College were some photocopies of old manuals and textbooks (Rubtsova and Gukhughe 1965; Semushkin 1948) as well as some single copies of Yupik language manuals from the 1980s (Ainana 1984; Ainana and Nakazik 1987). There had been no input of any post-1990 Yupik language pedagogical book in our college.

² The volume (Rodionova 2007b) contains 31 texts in Yupik language. The translators are Anatoly Saliko, Valentina Bragina and Aron Nutayg’e (Nutawyi). A second—bilingual—edition that will include the original Russian texts is planned to appear in 2008 for the students in the “Our language and literature” program at the Chukotka Multidisciplinary College.

³ It is possible that some texts from the 2007 volume had already been translated into Yupik in the 1930s and 1940s and included in the Yupik classes (see complete bibliography in Krauss 1973). Unfortunately, there are no copies of those early publications in the libraries in Chukotka; so the new generation of Yupik language teachers and students do not even know about their existence.

well the differences between the Yupik dialects that are spoken in Novoe Chaplino and in Sireniki.

Another textbook was just published by the Chukotka Multidisciplinary College, entitled *Sbornik rasskazov o starinnykh seleniakh eskimosov Providenskogo raiona* ('Collected stories about ancient Eskimo settlements in the Provideniya District') (Rodionova 2007a). It includes some oral stories from Yupik elders recorded by the ethnographer Igor Krupnik in the 1970s and 1980s (Krupnik 2000). One can find in it stories from Sireniki, Novoe Chaplino and Provideniya about the traditional Yupik way of life, hunting methods, and customs. That textbook includes 26 stories in both Yupik and Russian languages (translations in Yupik language were done by Aron Nutaug'e [Nutawyi] and edited by N. Rodionova). These stories are to be used in courses aiming to develop speech and reading skills in the Yupik language. So far, this textbook has been used only for the Yupik language programs at the Chukotka Multidisciplinary College, though there is a strong demand for it from Yupik language teachers in some village schools⁴.

The Chukotka Multidisciplinary College also released the handbook *Ukazatel' suffixov eskimoskogo iazyka* ('Index of suffixes in Eskimo language') (Rodionova 2007c). It presents a summary table of the major suffixes in the Yupik language. This material is extremely important for the organisation of Yupik language lessons since Yupik is an agglutinative language, that is, the words are made up of attaching suffixes to a root, and each suffix brings a new meaning. Therefore translating Yupik words to students who have not studied Yupik language before is a big challenge. In this context, the new index of suffixes is a valuable tool in learning word structures as well as in translating words, prepositions, and integral texts from Yupik to Russian and vice versa.

A precious complement to the *Eskimo language exercises for 1st year college students* (Rodionova 2006) and to the Yupik language manual by Georgii A. Menovshchikov and Nikolai B. Vakhtin (1990) is the grammar handbook *Formy glagol'noi osnovy ULIMA- "masterit" v eskimoskom jazyke* ('Linguistic variations in the verb ULIMA- "to make" in Eskimo language') (Rodionova 2007d). It includes tables with the grammar forms of one precise verb with all possible form-building and suffixes. Furthermore, the handbook presents verb structures in various declinations; the mechanism of suffixing and various phonetic processes that occur when morphemes are being connected to the root. In addition to the verb forms, it contains some nouns derived from the root *ulima* with the help of various suffixes. Finally, several examples of noun declensions are shown to the students in order to understand correctly the structure of the adjective and possessive forms.

⁴ Today, village schools in Chukotka suffer from acute deficit in Yupik language manuals and so are forced to use publications from the 1980s. New literature in Yupik language is practically absent from the village schools. In 2006, I personally sent to the school in Sireniki one copy of my first-year manual that was in print at that time (Rodionova 2006).

Conclusion

Yupik language beginners need the pedagogical materials described above. There is still an enormous work ahead in order to create a new generation of Native language manuals for the new generation of students and teachers. The good news is that the work has already begun and will continue in the special language laboratory at the Chukotka Multidisciplinary College.

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