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Preservation of the Nenets Language in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug: Based on Sociological Survey

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Abstract. The article presents the results of a sociological study conducted in 2022 in the city of Naryan-Mar, as well as in the villages of Nelmin Nos and Krasnoe of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug. Based on the results of interviews with specialists and experts in the field of the Nenets language, working in education and culture, as well as in the relevant executive authorities of the Okrug, conclusions about the preservation of the Nenets language in the region were made. Particular attention is paid to the respondents' perceptions of such aspects of the language situation as the use of the Nenets language by different population groups in various spheres of life, intergenerational transmission, the presence of the language in public space and on the Internet, and the motivation of the population to learn and use the language. The study resulted in recommendations for the preservation of the Nenets language in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, taking into account the linguistic situation in the region, as well as Russian and foreign practices for the preservation of small languages. The following are proposed as priority areas of work: (1) organizing systematic work to preserve and improve the status of the Nenets language in the Okrug; (2) supporting workplaces, initiatives, organizations and individuals involved in the preservation of language and culture; (3) creating an attractive language environment, especially in the digital sphere (the Internet), with a focus on primary school children; (4) supporting communities, especially reindeer herding communities and agricultural production cooperatives, where the language is used and its intergenerational transmission is maintained.

Keywords: *Nenets language, language preservation and revitalization, Nenets Autonomous Okrug, Russian Arctic, indigenous peoples, language vitality*

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Introduction

Today there are more than 7 000 languages in the world¹. Approximately 85% of them are “small” languages with less than 100 thousand speakers [1, Zamyatin K., Pasanen A., Saarikivi Y., p. 24]. At the same time, according to the Ethnologue directory, 3 045 languages or 43% of all languages in the world are in danger of extinction² and, according to the most pessimistic forecasts, up to 95% of languages may disappear by the end of this century. The urgency of the problem is emphasized by the fact that the UN has declared a decade from 2022 to 2032 to be the “Indigenous Languages Decade”, and the year 2022 officially became the “Year of Folk Art and Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Peoples of Russia” in the Russian Federation.

This problem is also relevant for the Nenets language, despite the fact that it is better preserved than many other languages of the small indigenous peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation. The number of speakers of the Nenets Tundra language is steadily declining. Thus, in the 1989 census, 79.5% of the Nenets indicated their knowledge of their ethnic language and 79.7% reported proficiency in Russian. In the 2002 census, these figures were already 75.8% and 88.8%³, in the 2010 census — 44% and 91.4%, respectively. The decrease in the number of native speakers is due to the gradual withdrawal of the Nenets language from the sphere of family communication and the destruction of the natural tradition of transmitting the language from parents to children. As S.I. Burkova notes: “Although the data of sociolinguistic surveys indicate a positive attitude of the Tundra Nenets towards their ethnic language, in fact, most parents prefer to speak Russian with their children, considering it more important, opening the way to education and career. The deeply rooted misconception that the functionally more powerful language of the majority of the population can only be mastered by abandoning one’s native language also plays a role here” [2].

The loss of their ethnic language by the Tundra Nenets is especially rapid in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug (NAO)⁴. The Tundra Nenets language is definitely endangered in NAO, except in the Yamb To community area. According to the 2010 All-Russian Population Census, only 750 people speak the Nenets language. According to a publication in the newspaper Naryan Vynder, in 2018, in fact, a significantly smaller number of Nenets in the NAO are fluent in the Nenets language⁵. According to preliminary data from the All-Russian Population Census for 2021, the number of Nenets people in the NAO amounted to 6713 people, and the number of those who speak

¹ How many languages are endangered? / Ethnologue: Languages of the World. URL: <https://ethnologue.com/guides/how-many-languages-endangered> (accessed 20 January 2023).

² Ibid.

³ Nenets language / Project of the Institute of Linguistics of the Russian Academy of Sciences "Minor Languages of Russia". URL: <https://minlang.iling-ran.ru/lang/neneckiy-yazyk> (accessed 20 January 2023).

⁴ Website "Small Languages of Russia" of the Institute of Linguistics of the Russian Academy of Sciences. URL: <https://minlang.iling-ran.ru/lang/neneckiy-yazyk> (accessed 20 January 2023).

⁵ *Kogda yazyk nem* [When the language is silent] // *Obshchestvenno-politicheskaya gazeta nenetskogo avtonomnogo okruga «Nar'yana Vynder»* [Socio-political newspaper of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug "Naryana Vynder"]. URL: <http://nvinder.ru/article/vypusk-no-139-20770-ot-18-dekabrya-2018-g/33922-kogda-yazyk-nem> (accessed 20 January 2023).

the Nenets language increased to 1 279 people⁶. At the same time, these data do not reflect such important aspects of assessing the language situation as the level of language proficiency, its use in various spheres of life, as well as intergenerational language transmission.

However, despite the relevance of the problem of preserving the Nenets language and its legislative protection, provided for by the Charter of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug⁷ and the Law “On the Nenets language on the territory of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug”⁸, there have been no studies of its preservation in recent years, which could form the basis for the elaboration of measures for its development.

Approaches to assessing the vitality of minor languages

According to the theory of vitality of an ethno-linguistic and social group, language is considered as one of the factors that determines the vitality of an ethno-linguistic group. The concept of vitality is used in various fields of science: in linguistics, in sociology (including social psychology) and in ethnology. Sociological and linguistic research studies the mechanisms of groups’ support of their integrity in the context of interaction with other groups, as well as tools for constructing a linguistic situation in the world.

Existing approaches to the definition of the concept of vitality and revitalization are determined by various models for measuring the state of the language, called vitality scales. An attempt of a comprehensive comparison of various scales of vitality on the empirical material of four minority languages of Russia was undertaken by the staff of the Institute of Linguistics of the Russian Academy of Sciences [3, Kazakevich O.A., Budyanskaya E.M., Evstigneeva A.P., Koryakov Yu.B., Mordashova D.D., Pokrovskaya S.V., Polivanov K.K., Renkovskaya E.A., Khalilova Z.M., Sheifer K.O.]. This work considers:

- UNESCO scale (six levels of vitality, based on 9 criteria, the most significant of which is intergenerational transmission);
- M. Krauss scale (seven levels of vitality, like UNESCO scale, with emphasis on the transfer of language from older generations to younger ones);
- EGIDS — Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (used in the Ethnologue, based on two criteria: areas of language use and language proficiency among representatives of different generations);
- ELCat — The Catalog of Endangered Languages (an integral scale that includes four parameters of language vitality: intergenerational transmission, absolute number of

⁶ All-Russian population census 2020. URL: https://rosstat.gov.ru/vpn_popul (accessed 20 January 2023).

⁷ Ustav Nenetskogo avtonomnogo okruga (s izmeneniyami i dopolneniyami) [Charter of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug (with amendments and additions)]. URL: https://constitution.garant.ru/region/ustav_nenetsk/ (accessed 20 January 2023).

⁸ Zakon Nenetskogo avtonomnogo okruga ot 18 marta 2013 g. N 4-OZ «O nenetskom yazyke na territorii Nenetskogo avtonomnogo okruga» (s izmeneniyami na 13 marta 2019 g.) [Law of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug of March 18, 2013 No. 4-OZ “On the Nenets language on the territory of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug” (as amended on March 13, 2019)]. URL: <https://docs.cntd.ru/document/553156630> (accessed 20 January 2023).

speakers, dynamics of the ratio of number of speakers and size of the ethnic group and sphere of use).

Contemporary research on the language situation studies the issues of the sociolinguistic state of individual languages^{9,10}, Contemporary research on the language situation studies the issues of the sociolinguistic state of individual languages¹¹ [8, Chambers N.A.; 9, Grenoble L.A.; 10, Hinton L., Huss L., Roche G.; 11, O'Dowd M.; 12, Hinton L., Hale K.; 13, Tarabukina U.P.], language policy at the regional level¹², as well as language documentation issues¹³.

Research materials and methods

During 2022, the authors of the article were involved in implementing the project “Possibilities for applying Russian and foreign experience in the preservation and revitalization of indigenous languages in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug” together with the Association of the Nenets People “Yasavey”. One of the objectives of the project was to analyze ideas about the state of preservation of the Nenets language on the territory of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug.

In order to fulfil this task, 39 semi-structured interviews were conducted in the period 19–25 September, 2022, with specialists and experts in the field of the Nenets language working in the following organizations: Ethnocultural Center of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, Central Library named after A.I. Pichkov, Nenets Regional Center for the Development of Education, Naryan-Mar Social and Humanitarian College named after I.P. Vyucheisky, Department of Internal Policy of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, Department of Education, Culture and Sports of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, Nenets Secondary School named after A.P. Pyrerki, a branch of the Ethnocultural Center of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug in the village of Nelmin Nos, a

⁹ Kharitonov V.S., Ivanov V.V., Kade M.A. Itogovye dokumenty, podgotovlennye v khode nauchno-issledovatel'skoy raboty «Razrabotka plana i metodik sokhraneniya i vrozozhdeniya yazykov Rossii. 2. Sostoyanie yazykov Rossii» [Final documents prepared in the course of the research work “Development of a plan and methods for the preservation and revival of the languages of Russia. 2. The state of the languages of Russia]. URL: https://iling-ran.ru/languages_of_russia/2021_stage1/doc2.pdf (accessed 20 January 2023).

¹⁰ Pavlova O.M. Sovremennaya yazykovaya situatsiya v soobshchestve tverskikh karel: kak tak vyshlo i chto my mozhem sdelat' [The modern language situation in the Tver Karelian community: how it happened and what we can do]. URL: <https://rutube.ru/video/974d23105da2a3da882b1c1aaaf241b8/> (accessed 20 January 2023).

¹¹ Vinkler E.A., Pavlova O.M. Itogovye dokumenty, podgotovlennye v khode nauchno-issledovatel'skoy raboty «Razrabotka plana i metodik sokhraneniya i vrozozhdeniya yazykov Rossii. 3. Rossiyskie praktiki sokhraneniya, vrozozhdeniya i razvitiya yazykov» [Final documents prepared in the course of the research work “Development of a plan and methods for the preservation and revival of the languages of Russia. 3. Russian practices of preservation, revival and development of languages”]. URL: https://iling-ran.ru/languages_of_russia/2021_stage1/doc3.pdf (accessed 20 January 2023).

¹² Zamyatin K.Yu. Formirovanie yazykovoy politiki RF i respublik: ot istorii k sovremennosti (ustnyy plenarnyy doklad [Formation of the language policy of the Russian Federation and the republics: from history to the present (oral plenary report)]) // Yazykovaya situatsiya i yazykovoy landschaft natsional'nykh regionov v KhKh — nachale XXI vv. [Language situation and language landscape of national regions in the XX - early XXI centuries]. Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tatarstan, Kazan, Russia, June 29, 2021.

¹³ Aralova N.B., Budyanskaya E.M., Syuryun A.A., Gruzdeva E.Yu. Kak dokumentirovat' yazyki, chtoby ikh sokhranit'. Metodicheskie rekomendatsii po sboru materiala dlya potentsial'noy podderzhki i revitalizatsii minoritarnykh yazykov [How to document languages in order to save them. Guidelines for collecting material for potential support and revitalization of minority languages]. URL: https://iling-ran.ru/languages_of_russia/2021_stage1/doc7_appendix2.pdf (accessed 20 January 2023).

kindergarten in the village of Nelmin Nos, a primary school in the village of Nelmin Nos and a secondary school in the village of Krasnoe. The sample also included 2 people who were associated with the Nenets language and culture as part of their professional activities in the past and who were active members of the Yasavey Association of the Nenets People at the time of the interview.

Due to time constraints, the authors of the article were unable to conduct field research in all settlements of the Okrug with a significant proportion of the Nenets population (Bugrino, Indiga, Oma, Nes, Khorey-Ver, Karatayka, Ust-Kara). The representativeness of the sample is ensured by the fact that the interviews were conducted in almost all district authorities and leading organizations engaged in activities in the field of the Nenets language and culture. In addition, the settlements where the interviews were conducted (Naryan-Mar, Nelmin Nos, Krasnoe) are home to a large share (about 45%) of the Nenets population of the NAO.

The interview guide included 3 groups of questions. The first group contained questions aimed at identifying respondents' perceptions of the preservation and development of the Nenets language in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug. In this block, the spheres and volumes of language use were identified (especially in education, mass media, the Internet, public administration), the level of its intergenerational transmission, the dynamics of these parameters over the past years. The choice of these aspects is due to their extremely high significance for the preservation of the language in accordance with the accepted scales of vitality [1, Zamyatin K., Pasanen A., Saarikivi J., p. 28].

The second group of questions was devoted to revealing the respondents' ideas about the factors influencing the motivation for learning and using the Nenets language by the population of the NAO. Due to the fact that the project was also aimed at formulating practical recommendations, the third group of questions in the guide was related to the study of respondents' perceptions of the implemented and realized measures to preserve the Nenets language in the Okrug as well as the possibilities to use Russian and foreign practices to preserve their native language.

Research results

Use of the Nenets language by various population groups

According to the results of the interview, all the respondents expressed serious concern about the preservation of the Nenets language on the territory of the NAO. Summarizing the interviews, it is possible to single out 3 groups of the Nenets population that use the Nenets language most actively. The first group includes nomadic reindeer herders; the second one — those, whose activities are directly related to the development of the Nenets language; the third group — the older generation of the Nenets.

1. As a language of everyday communication, the Nenets language is used among nomadic reindeer herders, primarily due to limited contacts with the Russian-speaking village environment and the lack of Russian-language vocabulary for denoting words related to reindeer herding. Re-

spondents unanimously agree that, first of all, the Nenets language was preserved in the Yamb To community. There is no consensus with regard to other communities and agricultural production cooperatives, with some respondents indicating that reindeer herders, especially the younger generation, speak Russian.

“Where the indigenous peoples live compactly (sparsely populated) — the Nenets. One can count on the fingers of one hand the settlements where there are still agricultural production cooperatives for reindeer herding. The children of reindeer herders who became sedentary tend to use their own Nenets language less frequently. Basically, this language is mixed with the Russian language. Yamb To speak their native language. They live in their own world, they didn't go to school, so they kept their native language” (respondent no. 19).

“The Nenets language is mostly used among reindeer herders, since the traditional way of life has been preserved and the environment itself suggests the use of the language” (respondent no. 9).

“As far as I know, the reindeer herders of the Yamb To community communicate freely. Other communities mix Nenets with Russian or use the Komi language” (respondent no. 5).

“Natives of the Yamb To community (speak Nenets). The use of Russian is extremely rare, as it is necessary due to the nature of their work and they lead a nomadic way of life” (respondent no. 39).

“It seems to me that lately Nenets has been used only in those settlements where there are speakers of their native Nenets, for example, the Yamb To community. It can be found in Nelmin Nose, in Krasnoe. And then, the guys from Bugrino who are my students, — there are no fluent speakers” (respondent no. 2).

“In the district, 7 000 out of 44 000 people are considered Nenets speakers, of which the Yamb To community speaks Nenets — about 100 people; people who roam nomadically speak Nenets; participants of the Ilebs theater teach young people along the way. Children practically do not speak Nenets” (respondent no. 36).

2. The Nenets language is used by those whose work is or has been related to the development of the Nenets language and culture. This group includes school teachers, educators, employees of specialized institutions: the Ethnocultural Center of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, the Nenets Regional Center for the Development of Education, the Social and Humanitarian College named after I.P. Vyucheisky, Nenets Central Library named after A.I. Pichkov, Nenets Museum of Local Lore, representatives of state authorities. This category also includes members of various creative groups, such as the Ilebs theater, the Khayar, Khaniyko, Maimba-va (Nelmin Nos settlement), and Nenei Syo (Krasnoe settlement).

“The Nenets language is widespread... among educational institutions — teachers of the native language and students, cultural institutions — specialists who speak the language, and consumers — participants of events” (respondent no. 9).

“Before I came to this job, I had never even thought about it (Nenets language). My mother is fluent in the language, she was born in the Bolshezemelskaya tundra and knows it perfectly. In everyday life in the city, I did not hear the Nenets language. I hear Nenets speech only at work in

the office, when I talk to my mother, and I also have a teacher of the Nenets language She texts me in Nenets” (respondent no. 6).

“They don’t speak it all the time, sometimes. In theaters, they tell poems and stories” (respondent no. 20).

Among other population groups, only the older generation (according to various respondents, this age is over 50–60 years old) uses the Nenets language in everyday communication with each other or in situations where they do not want to be understood by others. This mainly concerns the “national” settlements (Nelmin Nos, Krasnoe, Bugrino, Karatayka, Indiga, Oma, Nes).

The “middle” generation (35–45 years old) heard the Nenets language (they are the so-called “sleeping speakers”), and their children do not speak Nenets in everyday life, using it only in school lessons. Several respondents noted that teachers often teach Nenets in Russian.

“The situation is sad. The use of language is minimal. In schools, the language is not freely practiced, only in the lessons of the Nenets language and literature (and even then the teachers speak Russian). The language is not used freely in the district” (respondent no. 5).

“The problem of language is acute. It is rarely used in everyday life. Children and youth do not use. Mostly only the older generation... There are few native speakers of the Nenets language among urban dwellers. The Nenets language is spoken by people who live in the villages Nelmin Nos, Krasnoe, Korotayka, Indiga, Oma, Nes. Some of them lead a nomadic way of life” (respondent no. 39).

“There are still native speakers in the city who are over 35-40 years old, who have heard their native language more often. But they do not use it in everyday life and at work. Grandchildren and children no longer hear the Nenets language. The language can be used at cultural events. In settlements, the language has been preserved, but it is spoken by those who are over 30 years old” (respondent no. 19).

“People aged 60 and over speak the language. Young people and the younger generation only understand it” (respondent no. 34).

“Parents and grandparents do not speak their native Nenets language, modern children do not know the Nenets language” (respondent no. 19).

“Children and grandchildren no longer speak Nenets. Parents in Naryan-Mar mostly use Russian in communication” (respondent no. 1).

“In my childhood, parents talked to children. Now it is mostly Russian speech” (respondent no. 3).

“Adults can speak Nenets with children, but they receive answers in Russian” (respondent no. 5).

“Young people already understand, but do not speak. The problem is already real. A generation will gone, and that's it” (respondent no. 34).

“In the city and in the countryside, they speak Russian. We tried to speak Nenets, but we switched to Russian imperceptibly” (respondent no. 6).

“No, only grandma or grandpa will rarely say something to argue” (respondent no. 34).

Most respondents note the negative dynamics regarding the number of Nenets language speakers in the okrug, connecting this primarily to the loss of the older generation (*“decreased”, “the number of speakers is decreasing”, “it has become less”, “a noticeable drop, the statistics are sad, unfortunately”, “the dynamics are decreasing as people die and the older generation leaves”, “the number has decreased significantly due to the disappearance of the older generation”, etc.*). We recorded the opposite opinion only in one interview: *“It seems to me that the number is increasing. If you look at social networks, you can see that the number of people who speak Nenets is growing. It is being used more often in public spaces and at different events. Even in the street you can hear Nenets more often now”* (respondent no. 9).

Nenets language in public space

In public space, the Nenets language is found on signs on school buildings, public authorities, and state institutions. A number of respondents noted signs in public transport (buses) with individual words and phrases in the Nenets language and their translation into Russian. The newspaper “Naryana Vynder” publishes a page in the Nenets language (“Yalumd”), but many respondents considered this to be of little use due to the fact that the same information is presented in a more understandable Russian language.

Nenets language on the Internet

The Nenets language is partially present in the Internet space. A number of respondents noted in an interview the recent increase in the use of the language on various Internet resources (*“The Nenets language has been on the Internet lately. There are wishes, congratulations in Nenets. The Internet is now helping to support the native language. Interest is growing”*) (respondent no. 9).

The largest volume of video content in the Nenets language is published in the mass media: projects of the TV company Yamal-Media (news program Yalem dad Numgy, YouTube channel and vk.com community EthnoArctic), TV company Severnyy Gorod (news editions of the Television Service of Taimyr), the Krasnyy Sever newspaper — Nyaryana Erm (community vk.com, website with newspaper releases in the Nenets language), Nyaryana Vyder newspaper (Yalumd page).

The YouTube channel “Neney Vada” (Albert Okotetto) deserves special attention, as it contains a large amount of video recordings with native speakers of the Nenets language. There is also content in the Nenets language on the YouTube channels of Vladislav Vyucheykiy and Irina Kotkina.

A large amount of materials in the Nenets language is posted on the online resources of the Ethno-Cultural Center of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, the Nenets Central Library named after A.I. Pichkov (project “Living book of the Nenets language”), the Nenets Regional Center for the Development of Education (project “Thanks to the teacher of the native language”), the website “Chumoteka”.

On youtube.com and vk.com sites there are videos with folklore compositions of ensembles from the NAO (Ilebs theater, ensembles Khayar, Khaniyko, Maymbava, Ne-ney Syo) and the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug (Syra'sev, Shoyotey Yamal, Minley, You' Sey), as well as recordings of contemporary pop music (popular singers from the YNAO Nadezhda Serotetto and Nyamda Nyaruy). Videos prepared for the competition of covers in the folk languages of the indigenous peoples of the North "Singing Voices" have a high number of views.

The Nenets language is used in the thematic communities vk.com (Neney nenetsya il, Neney nenetsya "lahana") and profiles of social network users (for example, Olga Efremovna Latsheva). Nenets language lessons are posted on the youtube channels "Ethnographic expedition Real people" (9 lessons of basic Nenets language) and "Children of the Arctic" (5 lessons of Nenets language). At the time of preparation of this article, 6 cartoons were posted in the Nenets language ("At Lukomorye", "Winter Tale", "Two Bears", "Sparrow and Mouse", "Cuckoo", "A Red fox cub lived in the Tundra").

Nevertheless, there is little video content with high-quality images available on the Internet. There are practically no videos with subtitles that can be understood by both Russian and Nenets speakers.

Key problems hindering the preservation of the Nenets language in the NAO

The respondents were generally unanimous about the threatening language situation and its negative dynamics in recent decades. Based on the interviews, the authors of this study identified the main problems underlying the current situation with the Nenets language in the district.

1. The lack of demand for the Nenets language in most spheres of life, the lack of prestige of knowing the Nenets language, the absolute dominance of the Russian language. An exception is made by groups that use the Nenets language (see "Use of the Nenets language by various population groups"). Almost all respondents noted the low level of motivation among Nenets people to learn their native language.

"The feeling is that only we, the intelligentsia, need it, and the rest — only on holidays. The language is dying" (respondent no. 12).

"Young people do not see the practical use of the language. Families did not speak the Nenets language so that the children would know it well" (respondent no. 9).

"My mother has a big family. Brothers, sisters know the language, but they are forgetting it, and their children are not interested in the language. They even work in areas where language is not needed" (respondent no. 6).

"A young person, when he leaves his family, does not use his native language. He enjoys the benefits of civilization, where there is no Nenets language" (respondent no. 3).

"Parents do not always let their children study Nenets. Learning native Nenets is not necessary" (respondent no. 2).

“The older generation does not talk to us, and there is no point in teaching ourselves later in work, studies and career” (from an interview with a college student).

2. Weak development of the language environment, especially for young children. This is expressed, firstly, in the absence of intergenerational transmission (parents, grandparents most often speak Russian with their children). The generational gap in language proficiency is attributed by the majority of respondents to the fact that knowledge of the Russian language became the main social lift in the Soviet period. There was discrimination against speakers of the Nenets language and a de facto ban on language use; the system of boarding schools “cut off” children from parents leading a nomadic lifestyle. Most of the Nenets moved from a traditional nomadic way of life to a settled way of life, where the Russian-speaking language environment prevailed. Secondly, this problem is related to the lack of high-quality content (language environment) on the Internet and the digital sphere in general (see “Nenets language on the Internet”), as well as the limited number of hours of Nenets language teaching at school.

“They don’t speak, they don’t speak much, because now the Russian language is heard from everywhere: radio, TV. Grandmothers and parents mostly think in Nenets, but children do not. They study, read fairy tales — Russian is everywhere. When you rarely hear the Nenets language, and more often — Russian, you start thinking and speaking Russian” (respondent no. 19).

“Parents do not speak much Nenets with their children, which is why children laugh when they hear the Nenets language” (respondent no. 8).

“The main problem is that there is no use of language in the family, so the motivation is low” (respondent no. 39).

“It all depends on the family. If the parents want to teach the child, then the child will know the language” (respondent no. 2).

“There is no communication in the family, there is no desire of parents to communicate with their children. There is no system of continuity of language transmission” (respondent no. 39).

“The older generation does not transfer knowledge as much as it could” (respondent no. 8).

“There is no spoken environment, grandparents only speak Russian with their children and grandchildren” (respondent no. 25).

“Only now comes the realization that we should have spoken Nenets to the children. But usually the children are in kindergarten, and the parents are at work, in the evening there was no time to talk. Now children regret that they do not know their native language” (respondent no. 20).

“There is no media coverage of information, for example, children’s programs. It (the language) is not publicly available” (respondent no. 5).

3. In the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, there is such a phenomenon as the constraint of their own language and culture, which is not observed among the majority of the Nenets living in the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug. This problem was highlighted in interviews by a large number of respondents. In addition, it was repeatedly noted that there is almost no promotion of knowledge of the Nenets language today.

"The situation is critical! Only the older generation (50+) speaks the Nenets language. Nenets children are ashamed of their origin, they are afraid to speak their native language" (respondent no. 8).

"Unlike Yamal, the Nenets in the Okrug are afraid to speak and be proud of being Nenets" (respondent no. 1).

"There is no intrinsic motivation, they are embarrassed, ashamed of the language" (respondent no. 5).

"Embarrassed to speak Nenets language. This is the influence of the Soviet period" (respondent no. 7).

"It's embarrassing to speak it in the city, it is bullying" (respondent no. 34).

4. Insufficient material and methodological support of educational and cultural workers. This problem was mentioned by many respondents, emphasizing the low level of salaries and high workload, including instructions from management to take part in unpaid projects and initiatives. In turn, many private projects aimed at the development of the Nenets language are voluntary, financially unsupported initiatives. In addition, a number of employees of the education system pointed to the lack of housing in Naryan-Mar for specialists from other cities, low salaries, and extremely limited support for their own initiatives. A separate problem is the lack of high-quality educational and methodological materials for teachers and learners of the Nenets language, especially in digital format.

"Nenets language teachers complain that they have nowhere to get information from, unlike Russian language teachers. Now everyone is asked to use the Children of the Arctic portal, but there are few materials there" (respondent no. 5).

5. Lack of systematic work on the preservation and development of the language. To date, there are no approved targets, a list of activities for the development of the Nenets language and the state authorities responsible for their implementation. The majority of culture and education workers have a general pessimistic attitude towards the preservation of the language. Moreover, some respondents expressed concern that their efforts are being criticized by other Nenets. Mistakes in language use are often the subject of criticism (including due to the difference between the Bolshezemelskiy dialect of the Nenets language, accepted as a literary norm, and other dialects): *"The Nenets language is dying out. Even if it is spoken, it is not in pure Nenets language. Either they pronounce and write words incorrectly. Or they mix it with Russian"* (respondents no. 20 and no. 21).

"We seem to be all together, but at the same time separately"

6. Reduction in the number of Nenets leading a traditional way of life.

Existing practices for the preservation of the Nenets language in the NAO

The interviews also highlighted key findings, experiences and practices that contribute to the development of the Nenets language and that can be used as a basis for planning language development in the Okrug.

1. Legislative protection of the Nenets language. Article 14 of the Charter of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug¹⁴ provides for recognition and guarantees by the state authorities of the Okrug of the right of the Nenets people to preserve and develop the way of life, culture, language, protection of the native habitat, traditional way of life, economic activity and crafts in accordance with generally recognized principles and norms of international law, and international treaties of the Russian Federation, federal and regional legislation. Article 3 of the Law of the NAO dated March 18, 2013 N 4-OZ “On the Nenets language in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug”¹⁵ provides for the preservation and development, as well as social, economic and legal protection of the Nenets language in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug.

2. Regular budget financing of workplaces (educational and cultural institutions), whose functions include preservation and development of the Nenets language (Nenets regional center for the development of education, the Ethnocultural center of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, the Nenets central library named after A.I. Pichkov, city and village schools and cultural centers).

3. Teaching in schools in the Nenets language, availability of educational and methodological literature, holding a regional Olympiad for schoolchildren of the Okrug in their native language.

“Here Olga Ivanovna does her best. It's efficient! The children are very good, they open themselves up to the world. And you can see what kind of teachers work. It needs to be supported” (respondent no. 6).

“In our center we organise competitions and contests at regional level. Children take first place. If teachers didn't tell children about the Olympiads and competitions, the children wouldn't take part in them” (respondent No. 5).

4. The work of folklore groups — the theater Ilebts, the ensembles Khayar, Khaniy-ko, Maimbava (Nelmin Nos settlement), Neney Syo (Krasnoe settlement) and others — contributes greatly to the promotion of language and culture, encourages their participants to improve their language skills and unites interested citizens around them.

5. Publication of books in the Nenets language; the Nenets-language supplement “Yalumd” (“The Dawn”) to the newspaper “Naryana Vynder”; magazines “Punushka” and “Sava Yun” with texts in the Nenets language.

¹⁴ Ustav Nenetskogo avtonomnogo okruga (s izmeneniyami i dopolneniyami) [Charter of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug (with amendments and additions)]. URL: https://constitution.garant.ru/region/ustav_nenetsk/ (accessed 20 January 2023).

¹⁵ Zakon Nenetskogo avtonomnogo okruga ot 18 marta 2013 g. N 4-OZ «O nenetskom yazyke na territorii Nenetskogo avtonomnogo okruga» (s izmeneniyami na 13 marta 2019 g.) [Law of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug of March 18, 2013 No. 4-OZ “On the Nenets language on the territory of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug” (as amended on March 13, 2019).]. URL: <https://docs.cntd.ru/document/553156630> (accessed 20 January 2023).

6. Implementation of individual projects and initiatives aimed at preserving the Nenets language (language documentation within the framework of the Ethnorakurs project, the information and educational resource Chumoteka, Nenets language courses for adults, the Kubik cartoon studio, etc.).

7. Public events and actions: Reindeer Day, Days of Nenets Literature, Nenets culture festival “Sava Syo”, poetry, song, costume competitions/activities, etc.

“I am glad that cultural institutions are trying to revive the language through some kind of events” (respondent no. 19).

“Ethnomusic concerts are held. Tim Dorofeev and his band came. Guys from Norway came and rapped. It was very good. There was a girl who sang Nenets songs” (respondent no. 19).

“I went to a dictation in the Nenets language, it's cool! People are interested, it brings them together” (respondent no. 8).

“There is interest and demand, but (guys) are shy to speak in front of the camera” (respondent no. 4).

“Children and adults are interested in attending these events” (respondent no. 34).

“The guys are good, they open themselves up” (about competitions for schoolchildren), (respondent no. 6).

“This is effective, children are also interested” (about competitions for schoolchildren), (respondents no. 25–29).

“The interest has increased over the last two years, but it is only within the framework of events” (respondents no. 10–11).

8. Proactive, interested people who are not indifferent to the preservation of the Nenets language. Almost all of the interviewed respondents are implementing their own language preservation projects, often going beyond their official workplace duties.

9. Growing interest in the Nenets language and culture in recent years, mainly through participation in public events and actions. In addition, many respondents noted that in adulthood (over 35–40 years), the Nenets have an awareness and acceptance of their Nenets identity and, as a result, an understanding of the need to preserve the language and culture.

“Now there is an interest in language, in culture. And when all this is present, it becomes habitual. We try to carry out a lot of activities aimed at maintaining the Nenets language. Adults began to show interest in learning their native language” (respondents no. 9–10).

Conclusion

Based on the conducted sociological research, as well as on Russian and foreign experience in the preservation of small languages, this article proposes recommendations, the implementation of which will improve the situation with the Nenets language in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug. The authors propose 4 priority (cross-cutting) directions for the preservation and development of the Nenets language in the Okrug:

- building up systematic regular work on preserving, developing and improving the status of the Nenets language;
- supporting and stimulating workplaces, initiatives, organizations and individuals who work to preserve the Nenets language and culture in the Okrug;
- creating an attractive language environment, especially in the digital sphere (the Internet), with a focus on primary school children, as the main information is in the Internet today.
- supporting those communities, especially reindeer herding communities and agricultural production cooperatives, where the language is used and its intergenerational transmission is preserved.

The specific recommendations below are grouped into three groups according to the key areas in which efforts to preserve the language have the greatest impact: public administration, education, and media ¹⁶.

¹⁶ The proposed recommendations are generally consistent with the recommendations presented at events dedicated to the preservation and development of Russian languages: Rezolyutsiya «Mezhdunarodnoy konferentsii «Lingvisticheskiiy forum 2021: yazykovaya politika i sokhraneniye yazykov» [Resolution of the International Conference "Linguistic Forum 2021: Language Policy and the Preservation of Languages"]. URL: https://iling-ran.ru/web/index.php/ru/conferences/2021_lingforum/resolution (accessed 20 January 2023); Rezolyutsiya II Vserossiyskogo s"ezda uchiteley rodnykh yazykov, literatury i kul'tury korennykh malochislennykh narodov Severa, Sibiri i Dal'nego Vostoka Rossiyskoy Federatsii [Resolution of the II All-Russian Congress of Teachers of Native Languages, Literature and Culture of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation]. URL: <https://xn--80abbqipobve.xn--p1ai/novosti/ii-vserossiyskiy-sezd-uchiteley-rodnyh-yazykov-literatury-i-kul'tury-korennykh-malochislennykh-narodov-severa-sibiri-i-dalnego-vostoka-rossiyskoy-federatsii/> (accessed 20 January 2023); Postanovlenie Prezidiuma RAN ot 2 marta 2021 goda N 37 «Problemy izucheniya i sokhraneniya yazykov narodov Rossiyskoy Federatsii: nauchnye osnovy Kontseptsii gosudarstvennoy yazykovoy politiki» [Resolution of the Presidium of the Russian Academy of Sciences of March 2, 2021 N 37 "Problems of studying and preserving the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation: the scientific foundations of the Concept of the state language policy"]. URL: https://www.ras.ru/news/news_release.aspx?ID=b2f6b9ce-285d-4b3f-9fe5-c9265c94199e (accessed 20 January 2023); Rezolyutsiya po itogam provedeniya v 2022 godu serii meropriyatiy «Yazyki narodov Rossii v sisteme obshchego obrazovaniya Rossiyskoy Federatsii» [Resolution on the results of the series of events held in 2022 "Languages of the peoples of Russia in the system of general education of the Russian Federation"]. URL: <https://nra-russia.ru/glavnaya/meropriyatiya/yazyki-narodov-rossii-itogovaya-rezolyucziya-2022.html> (accessed 20 January 2023); Protokol № 1 zasedaniya Rabochey gruppy Komiteta Gosudarstvennoy Dumy po delam natsional'nostey po zakonodatel'nomu obespecheniyu etnokul'turnogo razvitiya narodov Rossii i sovershenstvovaniyu yazykovoy politiki [Protocol No. 1 of the meeting of the working group of the State Duma Committee on nationalities on legislative support for the ethno-cultural development of the peoples of Russia and the improvement of language policy]; Itogovaya rezolyutsiya IX s"ezda Assotsiatsii korennykh malochislennykh narodov Severa, Sibiri i Dal'nego Vostoka Rossiyskoy Federatsii [Final resolution of the IX Congress of the Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation]. Salekhard, 04-08 april 2021. URL: <https://raipon.info/upload/iblock/ef3/ef3933afb4401958e2520842ef2dbbc16.pdf> (accessed 20 January 2023); Rezolyutsiya S"ezda korennykh malochislennykh narodov Severa Nenetskogo avtonomnogo okruga v g. Nar'yan-Mar [Resolution of the Congress of Indigenous Minorities of the North of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug in Naryan-Mar], March 21-22, 2019. URL: <https://smi.adm-nao.ru/kmns/aktualnaya-informaciya-dlya-kmns/sezd-kmns-nao-2019/> (accessed 20 January 2023); Rezolyutsiya seminar-soveshchaniya «Yazyki korennykh narodov Kraynego Severa v sisteme obshchego obrazovaniya Rossiyskoy Federatsii» [Resolution of the seminar-meeting "Languages of the indigenous peoples of the Far North in the system of general education of the Russian Federation"], September 19-21, 2021; Rezolyutsiya po itogam zasedaniya Vserossiyskogo kruglogo stola «Perevod s ispol'zovaniem yazykov narodov Rossii. Nenetskiy yazyk» [Resolution on the results of the meeting of the All-Russian round table "Translation using the languages of the peoples of Russia. Nenets language"], June 14, 2022. URL: <https://narfu.ru/life/news/university/370602/> (accessed 20 January 2023).

Recommendations in the area of public administration

1. Drafting a strategic planning document (strategy, concept, state program) for the preservation and development of the Nenets language on the territory of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug. The adoption of a strategic planning document is extremely important for the concentration of limited resources to achieve the set goal. The strategy will allow building systematic work with the definition of priorities, targets, distribution of areas of responsibility, determination of sources and volumes of financial support. At the same time, it is crucial to identify the public authority responsible for the implementation of this document.

2. Regular monitoring of the preservation of the Nenets language on the territory of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug and assessment of the measures taken to preserve the language are important measures in order to build systematic work in this direction.

3. Systematic support for events, competitions and actions to promote the Nenets language and culture. This measure, according to the majority of respondents, makes it possible to attract and maintain attention of the general public to the preservation of the Nenets language. At the same time, holding one-time events does not replace full-fledged language training and immersion in the language environment.

4. Allowances and/or other forms of material support for teachers of the subject “Native (Nenets) Literature”, as well as conducting extracurricular work on the preservation and development of the Nenets language. Most educators interviewed noted that there is a 15% salary bonus for Nenets language lessons, but pointed out that there are no bonuses for teaching native literature or extracurricular activities. Many of them praised the further increase in allowances or the expansion of the circle of their recipients: specialists involved in the preservation of the Nenets language and culture, employees of educational organizations of secondary vocational education, cultural institutions, government bodies (*“No matter how mercantile it sounds, but a serious material support, almost at the salary level, is needed”*; *“The most important thing is the policy of introducing the language into the family by measures of material and financial support”*; *“If they did this to employees of the administration, it would be good”*). At the same time, it was noted that this might cause a negative reaction from representatives of other nationalities.

5. Development and implementation of a mechanism for providing housing for specialists working in the field of preservation and development of the Nenets language on the territory of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug.

“We need to competently attract specialists so that they are not disappointed, to provide good living conditions. It is necessary to be able to keep such people” (respondent no. 19).

6. Regular professional development for specialists in the field of preservation of the Nenets language and culture (including internships, exchange of experience with colleagues from the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug).

“If our teachers were sent to the YNAO to adopt experience, it would be effective” (respondent no. 8).

7. Expansion of the use of the Nenets language in public space (signboards, social advertising, etc.), including in the context of tourism development. Most of the respondents had a positive attitude towards the duplication of signboards, road signs in Russian and Nenets (*“Recently, it has even become prestigious to name a company or organization with a Nenets name”* (respondent No. 2)). However, not all respondents were convinced that this would have a great effect on language preservation. It was also suggested that this measure would increase interest of tourists from other regions. A number of representatives of state authorities believe that this idea cannot be implemented (*“They won’t let it be done”*; *“It will be difficult to promote this initiative”*).

In general, the majority of respondents supported the idea of social advertising calling for the study of their native language. However, some respondents doubted the real effect of this measure and suggested that it could cause an ambiguous reaction from representatives of other nationalities. As with the duplication of signage, several respondents expressed the opinion that this measure could contribute to the development of tourism.

Recommendations in the area of education

1. Creation of a portal of the Nenets language, which includes online dictionaries, phrasebooks (useful words and expressions), language learning materials, methodological developments for teachers, information about the history and culture of the people and the region, a library with texts in the language. The vast majority of respondents noted that this measure is extremely necessary, due to the fragmentation and lack of quality materials for teachers and learners of the Nenets language.

“We have to develop our methodological materials. Therefore, there is a demand” (respondents no. 28–29).

“It would be great, since I do all the work myself and not on a computer” (respondent no. 22).

“If there is a good quality portal, it will really be in demand” (respondent no. 19).

“Of course it is necessary, and we could get involved in this idea. It is important to include the best practices in the Okrug, as well as to use the experience of the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug” (respondent no. 39).

“It would be great, since there is no such platform” (respondents no. 11–12).

2. Development of online dictionary of the Nenets language, available on the Internet and as a mobile application.

“I am for modern technology. We should definitely try it. Because there is no such thing now! Few people use paper dictionaries” (respondent no. 19).

3. Development of an electronic study guide, including a high-quality mobile application for teaching the Nenets language in an interactive form. The majority of respondents believe that such an application with game-like tasks would be an effective tool for language learning, especially for school age children. However, some respondents noted that it is not clear who would be able to implement and, importantly, to support this project in future.

"This is useful! Children do not want to use textbooks" (respondent no. 8).

"Children have motivation before they go to school as they learn about the world, and then interest disappears due to the 'dryness' of teaching" (respondent no. 22).

"If there was a quality mobile application — why not. There is a mobile application with simple phrases in the Nenets language for non-native speakers to learn, but it is not of good quality" (respondent no. 5).

"There were those who wanted to do it. But they thought it was a one-time action. It needs to be constantly updated. I would be glad if there was a person who would do this" (respondent no. 19).

4. Continuation of Nenets language courses for adults. Some respondents expressed doubts about the effectiveness of this measure because a significant number of those who started the courses did not complete them: *"There were 25 people. After six months, about 10 people left"*, *"We have 20 people. A few months passed, the group began to decrease, because people did not understand why they needed it. Only 6 people remained for the second year"* (respondent no. 19). Despite the lack of consensus on the issue, we believe that this is a very important undertaking necessary for those who need the Nenets language to perform their job functions. One of the respondents noted that *"of course, especially (this is important) for a professional background"* (respondent no. 5), criticizing the results of the "Teacher of the Year" competition due to the fact that some winning teachers are not fluent in the Nenets language and can teach only "textbook conversation".

In addition, according to a number of respondents, the courses allow strengthening the Nenets identity of a person (*"people begin to understand who they are ... to preserve the way of life of their ancestors"* (respondent No. 8)), give confidence to those who are embarrassed to use the Nenets language (*"maybe they would not be so shy"* (respondent no. 19)).

5. Development of a project of ethno-cultural camps (schools) for children with immersion in the language environment and traditional economic activities. In general, the respondents positively assessed the possible implementation of this practice; however, many respondents noted the following obstacles that may arise. Firstly, these are organizational difficulties, in particular, registration of the departure of children in accordance with the law (including compliance with sanitary and epidemiological rules and norms of the camping ground). Secondly, there are currently limited opportunities for potential locations for these schools. The only community where the Nenets language is spoken is Yamb To, which can only be reached by helicopter; it requires large financial resources. Thirdly, the stay of children in the community will encroach upon time of its members, necessary for conducting economic activities. Finally, such an event should last long enough to ensure immersion in the environment of traditional life (*"You can't learn much in a week"* (respondent no. 3), *"Yes, but you need to be sent there for six months to be able to engage in traditional economic activities as soon as possible"* (respondent no. 5)).

"If you go to Yamb To, there might be a result, as the language is more or less preserved there. But getting into a different environment with strangers and experiencing daily life is very

difficult. If you start loading the children with the language, they will start whining. They are all on their phones all the time” (respondent no. 19).

“It's totally fine and is in Yamal! I would also like to set up a nomadic school and take children to Yamb To” (respondent no. 22).

“That's great! This is very good. Children need to be immersed in the interactive activities. Take them out of the city. There will be an effect!” (respondents no. 9–10).

“It will be a positive effect for children. Actually, children go to (some) reindeer herding teams every summer” (respondent no. 3).

“(This practice) is the most effective, as children are immersed in their true culture” (respondent no. 22).

6. Identification of talented students and further targeted training at the Institute of the Peoples of the North of the Herzen State Pedagogical University. Many respondents noted that, despite the difficult situation in providing the Okrug with teaching staff and specialists in the field of the Nenets language and culture, in recent years, applicants from the Nenets Autonomous Okrug were not sent to study at the Institute of the Peoples of the North for various reasons.

Recommendations in the area of media

1. Translation (dubbing and subtitles) of popular films and cartoons into the Nenets language is assessed by the majority of respondents as an effective measure to preserve the language. Some respondents indicated that there are cartoons filmed or translated into the Nenets language, however, the analysis of open sources revealed only 6 ones (see “Nenets language on the Internet”).

“It would be very good if there were such cartoons in the Nenets language as “Well, just you wait!”. Children are interested, they learn information” (respondent no. 8).

“I think it would be possible! I would like to watch some famous movie. And people would have come if there was an action related to watching the translated film” (respondent no. 6).

“The dubbing of popular films will probably also have positive effects on those who watch them. If children are shown such a familiar content, it is also possible to achieve some results. The child will make analogies, know the plot, the characters” (respondents no. 9–10).

“Yes, it is, but on the condition that they understand the language well” (respondent no. 13).

“There are cartoons, but they do not reflect the essence of the Nenets language much, and it's not bad for presentation and hearing, this practice could work” (respondents no. 28–29).

“There is such a practice, (cartoons) “Cuckoo” and “Sun”, for example. But foreign ones would be much more effective” (respondents no. 3, 22).

“They don't show it on the Sever TV channel, but with subtranslation, then most likely yes, they could watch it” (respondent no. 34).

2. Creation of TV shows and/or radio programs in the Nenets language. Taking into account the experience of the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug and the Krasnoyarsk Krai, we recom-

mend developing a project for the creation of such programs. However, this measure requires large financial expenses and, probably, the involvement of personnel from the above-mentioned regions, since specialists who would be both native speakers and specialists in the field of television, radio and media production are needed.

3. Organizational and technical support for blogs about the Nenets language, culture and way of life. Many respondents noted that they watch or use video content created by residents of the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, and also know popularizers of the Nenets language from the YaNAO (Albert Okotetto, Khadri Okotetto). In the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, judging by the number of views, the YouTube channels of Vladislav Vyucheykiy and Irina Kotkina are quite popular. The prevailing opinion of the respondents is that it is possible to “grow up” bloggers, but technical support, training in filming, editing and promoting content is extremely important.

“There are definitely some in Yamal! If there were such bloggers, then the population would definitely watch them. I would take it on, but I don't know how to film or edit” (respondents no. 9–10).

“The guys are speakers from Herzen (Institute of the Peoples of the North). Vlad Vyucheykiy is doing a similar thing. There are many of them, they are in different ends. This work is not systemic. Everyone is trying to do it in their own way” (respondent no. 9–10).

“It is interesting! But it requires technical assistance and help of people who know the language” (respondent no. 36).

“Blogs would be interesting, to learn about life and everyday activities” (respondents no. 23–24).

A number of respondents noted that channels exclusively in the Nenets language would not be popular due to the practical absence of native speakers in the Okrug (*“It would not work for the general public — there are not so many native speakers”* (respondent No. 8); *“We saw it in Yamal, but it's easier to accept content in Russian”* (college students)).

4. Creation of the interface of the social network “VKontakte” in the Nenets language was considered an effective measure by about half of the respondents. We believe that this is a relatively affordable measure that will draw attention to the Nenets language and raise its status.

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