

Language contact in the territory of the former Soviet Union

Workshop convenors

Diana Forker, University of Bamberg

Lenore A. Grenoble, University of Chicago

Contact between Russian and other languages is long-standing and extensive, with Russian speakers spreading across Eurasia to the Pacific coast in the east and to the Baltic Sea in the northwest. The colonial expansion of Imperial Russia, followed by Soviet expansion, has meant that speakers of Russian have been in some sort of socially dominant position over speakers of other languages for centuries. The vast geographic and political spread of Russian has meant that its speakers have been in contact with speakers of languages that differ not only typologically and genealogically but also demographically, including regional languages such as Uzbek or Kazakh on the one hand, and the so-called small-numbered languages (a term first coined by the Soviet regime to refer to languages with less than 50,000 speakers) on the other. Thus the social dimensions of contact with Russian can vary radically. Taken together, these differences—linguistics and social—provide fertile ground for the investigation of contact-induced change.

Contact with Russian has provided important data for the study of code switching (e.g. Rusakov 2004), mixed languages, such as Copper Island Aleut (e.g. Golovko & Vakhtin 1990), the interaction between code-mixing and mixed languages (such as Golovko 2003, Pakendorf 2009) and Russian pidgins (e.g. Perekhval'skaja 2008), to name just a few.

In this workshop we investigate the linguistic and sociolinguistic interactions between Russian and indigenous minority (or small-numbered) languages of the Russian Federation, with special attention to both linguistic outcomes and the sociolinguistic contact settings that may influence them. Working with a range of different minority languages, all currently in unbalanced social settings where Russian is dominant, both politically, economically, and numerically in terms of speakers. It is thus not surprising that the majority of papers present data illustrating the influence of Russian at all linguistic levels, from phonology to discourse.

A core issue in the study of contact linguistics is the role of differing sociolinguistic settings, in particular the question of whether different contact situations lead to different outcomes). The differing social dynamics and contact ecologies found in the vast Russian spread zone provide important data and points of contrast in this regard. A set of papers in the workshop are framed around this issue, while others address it among other issues. Of particular note is the position of Russian pidgins in these dynamic contact ecologies. The border area between Russia and China has long been a region of trade, and the use of pidgin here was first attested in travelogues from the late 1700s.

A second recurrent theme is the role of code-mixing in language contact, borrowing, transfer and interference. The papers in the workshop show the pervasive use of code-mixing and examine it as a mechanism for the introduction of Russian linguistic elements.

References

- Golovko, Evgenij V. 2003. Language contact and group identity: The role of “folk” linguistic engineering. In Yaron Matras & Peter Bakker (eds.), *The mixed language debate. Theoretical and empirical advances*, 177-207. Berlin - New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Golovko, Evgenij V. & Nikolai B. Vakhtin. 1990. Aleut in contact: The CIA enigma. *Acta Linguistica Hafniensia* 22: 97-125.
- Pakendorf, Brigitte. 2009. Intensive contact and the copying of paradigms: An Èven dialect in contact with Sakha (Yakut). *Journal of Language Contact* 2: 85-110.
- Perexval'skaja, Elena. 2008. *Russkie pidzhiny*. [Russian pidgins] St. Petersburg: Aleteja.
- Rusakov, Aleksandr. 2004. *Interferencija i pereključenje kodov (severnoruskij dialect cyganskogo jazyka v kontaktologičeskoj perspektive)*. [Interference and code-switching (Northern Russian Romany in a contact perspective)]. Doctoral dissertation. Saint Petersburg: ILI RAN