

Ethno-Linguistic Processes in Post-Soviet South Siberia

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In the 1990s, the Turkic languages spoken in South Siberia (Tuvan, Altai, Khakas, Shor and numerous other Turkic varieties) received a powerful stimulus for their further development due to a growth of the national sentiments and political changes in Russia as a whole. Tuvan, Altai and Khakas, were given the status of state languages alongside Russian in the respective national republics of the Russian Federation: Tyva (formerly Tuva), Mountainous Altai and Khakasia. This article describes the new sociolinguistic situation that arose after these languages were made official languages. Although it has no national administrative territory, Shor was able to revive its written form.

The process of national revival also touched minor ethnic groups of Turks in Northern (Kumandy, Tuba, Chalkan) and Southern (Teleut, Telengit) Altai. In the 1920s and 1930s, they were, rather voluntarily, united with Southern Altai ethnic groups (*Altai-kiži*) in the framework of the Altai Autonomous Region of the USSR and, until very recently, have not been considered separate nations. Consequently, their languages were treated as dialects of the Altai literary language based on the *Altai-kiži* linguistic variety. This worked more or less well for the Southern Altai varieties, in particular for Telengit, but not so well for the Northern Altai linguistic varieties very far from the *Altai-kiži* idiom. The speakers of Tuba, Kumandy and Chalkan had to learn Altai almost as a foreign language. Their native linguistic varieties did not have a literary form and were not taught at school. They were also, with rare exceptions, ignored by linguists. Together with other social and economic factors, this led to a gradual decline of these languages, making them acutely endangered. At present, they have the status of separate languages and attempts are underway to develop their literary forms.

The disintegration of the literary Altai language also involved the Teleut and Telengit ethnic groups, whose languages are quite close to the *Altai-kiži* idiom. The Telengit have not had any difficulty in using Altai as their literary form. However, at present, these groups are considered to be separate nations and want to develop a distinct literary form. This means that our understanding of the dialectal system of the Altai literary language has become outdated and is in need of review.

Turkic state languages of South Siberia

Tuvan, Khakas and Altai have been functioning as state languages along with Russian in the national republics for a few years already. Respective language

laws have been passed in all the republics, proclaiming equal status of both the Russian and national languages. This has opened up possibilities for broadening the social functions of these Turkic languages. Their use as languages of administration, mass media, education, etc. has fueled their fast development and created certain problems, e.g. a lack of specialized terminology. In all the republics, terminology commissions have been set up in order to fill this gap; orthographic norms have been discussed and developed, orthographic dictionaries and secondary and higher school textbooks published, etc. However, we can state that these language laws are not fully functioning in all these republics and that there are numerous problems with the implementation of these laws in practice. In fact, there are some indicators that even a state language, like Khakas, can come to the brink of being endangered.

The sociolinguistic situation in these republics is characterized by three major features: by bilingualism and misbalance (the overwhelming majority of the Turkic population are bilingual while very few people of non-Turkic population of these republics speak Turkic languages), and by the equal legal status of Russian and the national languages.

Contrary to the legal status, the demographic status of the South Siberian Turkic state languages differs. The Khakas sociolinguist Borgojakova (2004: 33–39) distinguishes three types of demographic situations found in this region: 1) a balanced one (found in Tyva), 2) a relatively balanced one (Mountainous Altai), 3) a misbalanced one (Khakasia). In Tyva, the native population prevails; the language has a full set of social functions. In Mountainous Altai, there are more Russian speakers than Altai ones; the Altai constitute one third of the population of the republic¹; the proclaimed equality of Altai and Russian is realized only partially. In Khakasia, the Khakas constitute only one tenth of the population; the overwhelming majority of the population is Russian speaking; the equal rights of Khakas and Russian remain a mere declaration.

The criterion of language transmission from generation to generation is also very important for diagnosing the sociolinguistic situation and the languages' "health". According to this criterion, Tuvan is the "healthiest" and strongest language of the region. All Tuvan children speak Tuvan; it is the language spoken at home in all Tuvan families. The situation is different in Khakasia. Sociolinguistic research conducted in 2000-2002 showed that only 1.6% of 11-14-year-old Khakas people speak only Khakas with their Khakas friends, although 29.8% of them can speak Khakas and use the language when speaking with older people. The situation is slightly better among other age groups. But the speed of the language loss is menacing: 69.8% of 21-30-year-olds can speak Khakas, whereas the

¹ Here we mean the entire indigenous Turkic speaking population of the Altai Republic, including all its ethnic and sub-ethnic groups.

percentage is drastically lower among the younger age groups: it is 64.1% among 18-20 year-olds, 34% among 15-17-year-olds, 29.8% among 11-14-year-olds and, finally, it is only 28.8% among 7-10-year-olds (Borgojakova 2004). Within the span of one generation the percentage of children learning Khakas as their mother tongue has declined by more than one half.

Among various factors that have led to this language shift in the recent past and that continue to have some degree of impact until now, the following should be mentioned :

- The massive influx of Russian-speaking people;
- Bilingualism of the native population;
- Official policy in the 1940s-1980s stressing assimilation and Russian monolingualism;
- Absence of sociolinguistic research in the region during a period of almost half a century;
- As a consequence, absence of information on the sociolinguistic processes in this region and on the consequences of native language loss for individuals and for the whole community;
- Stereotypes of bilingualism being harmful to the social adaptation of children: The older generations had suffered from a poor command of the dominant language and were trying to ensure that their children would not have the same problems with Russian; the price for that was loss of their native language; we observe this motivation not only in South Siberia but also in other parts of the Russian Federation (Vaxtin 2001);
- Low social prestige and limited social functions of native languages;
- Educational system: e.g. Khakas was not even taught as a subject in the majority of schools in Khakasia with the exception of a few national Khakas schools; only 6% of Khakas children in remote rural districts could receive primary education in Khakas; school curricula did not contain courses in native history, geography and culture.
- At present, there is an understanding of the danger of a complete loss of the native languages and a desire to prevent this. Measures are being taken to broaden their social functions. However, administrative measures alone are useless if the natural transmission of the language to the younger generation has stopped (Fishman 1991).

Important factors for the preservation of these languages are as follows:

- Increased tolerance of people belonging to the dominant culture toward Siberian native cultures and languages;
- Support of public national organizations and societies aimed at the preservation of the native languages and cultures;

- Dissemination of information about the indigenous languages and cultures of Siberia via the mass media, educational measures, etc.;
- Introduction of modern educational concepts and school curricula that preserve and develop the national languages and cultures;
- Permanent sociolinguistic and sociological research that analyzes and monitors the contemporary ethnic and linguistic processes and assesses the impact of measures taken on the current sociolinguistic situation;
- Linguistic research of Siberian native languages to establish a scientific basis for different kinds of modern textbooks: native language textbooks, language textbooks for people learning these languages as foreign ones, Russian textbooks for national schools, foreign language textbooks for national schools;
- Linguistic research aimed at developing the literary norms and terminology in these languages: on the one hand, the present literary norms reflect the state of the languages at the beginning of the previous century; they are at present very far from the spoken languages and in urgent need of revision; on the other hand, the official status of these languages demands an enormous broadening of their political, social and economic terminology.

The Khakas literary language is facing another linguistic problem now, which we would like to discuss in more detail. The Khakas variety chosen as the basis of the literary language in the beginning of the previous century, i.e. the Ust'-Abakan variety of the *Kača* dialect, was spoken by one of the largest groups of Khakas people at that time. In 1820 (Krivonogov 1997: 41-48), the *Kača* were even the largest group of Khakas speakers (36.6% as compared to the Sagays at 32.2%). In the 1920s, the *Kača* were also the most active and educated group of the Khakas population, producing the first Khakas linguists, teachers, authors of Khakas textbooks and the first Khakas writers. The situation is quite different now. The areas where *Kača* speakers live are adjacent to the Abakan-Krasnojarsk railway line. Thus, the contacts with Russian-speaking migrants have been most intensive there. As a result, *Kača* speakers have become Russified to a greater degree than the rest of the Khakas population. Thanks to their good command of Russian, they were also more mobile, so more *Kača* speakers left Khakasia than speakers of other dialects, foremost the Sagays, who were always a very large dialectal group in Khakasia. In the course of the second half of the twentieth century, the Sagays had assimilated the smaller dialectal groups, and in 1989 already constituted 68.1% of all Khakas speakers, i.e. more than the speakers of all other dialects taken together including the *Kača*, judging by the census data (Krivonogov 1997: 41-48). However, the Khakas literary norms are still based on the *Kača* idiom, which in many respects is very different from the Sagay idiom. This creates many problems for the majority of Khakas speakers who have to learn literary Khakas. Although literary Khakas has been taught for more than seven decades at school by now, the only speakers really using it are moderators on Khakas television and radio and Khakas language teachers. However, they are also

mostly Sagay speakers and have difficulties using the literary norm when speaking. As for modern Khakas literature, it uses the Sagay idiom since Sagays constitute the majority of the readers. What is necessary in this situation is a profound language reform which would base the new literary norms on Sagay. This question is being discussed at present in Khakasia and in the Turkological community in Siberia as a whole (Karpov 2004: 126-130).

Revival of literary Shor

The Shors are one of the most numerous native people of the Kemerovo region. They live in Mountainous Shoria, a mountainous area in the south of the Kemerovo Region adjacent to Mountainous Altai. According to census data, their numbers were: in 1897 – 11,674, in 1926 – 12,600, in 1959 – 14,900, in 1970 – 16,500 and in 1989 – 15,900 people.

Shoria developed as a separate nation with its own identity and national sentiment within the Turkic-speaking groups of this region during the last three centuries. Ethnologists delineate three main periods in the formation of Shor ethnic identity (Kimeev 1989):

1. The formation of territorial ethnic groups of Shors within the administrative ethnic territory (Russian *Kuzneckij uezd*), from the beginning of the seventeenth until the beginning of the twentieth century.
2. National and cultural consolidation within the autonomous national district (*Gorno-Šorskij nacional'nyj rajon*), 1926–1939. At that time, the processes of national development were very intensive. The most important contributing factors were the development of the literary language, school instruction in Shor, and the spread of literacy among the Shor population. At this time the language was vigorously developing its literary norms: it was taught at school; a considerable number of books in Shor were published (they number more than 150 titles); and the language, folklore and ethnology of the Shors were studied intensively.
3. From the early 1940s until the early 1980s, the Shor nation was subject to the active imposition of the dominant Russian culture. In addition to the negative factors common to the sociolinguistic situation in this region, a long period when the language was neither written nor taught at school should be added. In these years, the Shors not only lost their literary language, but they were also at the brink of full assimilation.

The tragic events of 1937-45 had a devastating effect on the national culture of the Shors. Beginning in 1942, when the last issue of the Shor-language newspaper *Kyzyl Šor* (Red Shoriya) was published and all the Shor schools were closed, the language was no longer written, nor was it taught in schools for half a century. Its functional sphere was reduced to home use and everyday topics. All the

other cultural needs were met by Russian, which became the language of education, literature, mass media, and administrative, political and economic relations. During this period, several generations of urban Shors grew up barely able to speak and understand Shor, if at all.

We are hopeful that at present, from the late 1980s until now, the Shors are living through the fourth period in the history of their nation – that of a national and cultural revival (Nevskaya 1998).

Thus, in 1985, the *Olgudek-Pajram* holiday was renewed and became traditional again. It is usually celebrated on the first Sunday of June, on the eve of haymaking. The festivities consist of ritual entertainment and sports. Symbolic sacrifice to the ancestors and local spirits and prayers for a good harvest and hunt are followed by competitions in national wrestling, tug-of-war, archery and the climbing of a horizontal bar. In the evening, quiz games about the history of the Shor people are held, some everyday life scenes from the past are performed, and people sing native songs. This holiday is very popular among the Shor people, especially the youth. A folk ensemble by the name of *Chyltys* (Star) was created in 1985. This ensemble still exists, combining education with cultural entertainment (Stukova in print).

The revival of *literary Shor* began with the publishing of Shor textbooks, the training of Shor language teachers, and the teaching of Shor at school and in Shor language circles. In 1988, the Department of the Shor Language and Literature was created at Novokuznetsk State Pedagogical Institute (NGPI; at present the Kuzbass State Pedagogical Academy). Its first head was Professor Andrej Čudojakov. The same year, the national department was opened at the Faculty of Philology and the training of Shor language and literature teachers began. One year later the Shor language began to be taught in a number of schools by teachers of different subjects – Shors by nationality. They were graduates of two-year courses given by the leaders of Shor language circles, organized in Novokuznetsk by Dr. Alisa Esipova. The Shor primer and textbooks for the primary stages of education were written by Dr. Nadežda Kurpeško (Kemerovo) and by members of the Shor Department. In 1994, the first five graduates of the national department began to work at schools in the Kemerovo Region. At present, about twenty teachers of Shor work at schools in the Taštapol and Meždurečensk districts of Mountainous Shoria, in both cities and villages. Some schools which had been closed between ten and thirty years ago have resumed teaching. Some schools have been newly built (Nevskaya 1998).

However, it might already be too late since the Shors have already lost a major part of their ethnic heritage during the period of oppression. Moreover, the current economic situation in the region motivates language shift. In the rural areas, there has been no work for decades, so the Shor population has moved to the cities, where language loss is very rapid as there is no use for the national language and proficiency in Russian is all that matters. Language transmission virtu-

ally stopped a few decades ago so that only the elderly people can still speak the language fluently. The epic tradition is also decaying since there are no longer any young story tellers. The few Shor story tellers are over seventy now.

According to the most recent research, the current demographic situation in Shoria is grave and the population is dramatically decreasing. Mortality among native people has risen due to the lack of life perspectives and the growing consumption of alcohol. Natural population growth has decreased; native people hesitate to bring children into a world of crisis and growing poverty. Young people aim to migrate to towns and large settlements, while only the elderly stay in their native villages (Sadovoj 1997: 217).

Moreover, literary Shor faces problems very similar to those of the Khakas literary language: its literary norms are in need of a profound reform. The literary variety is based on the Mras dialect of the Shor language. However, the majority of the Shor population still preserving their national language and traditional way of life now live in the upper reaches of the Kondum and Mras rivers, where a separate variety of the Kondum dialect has formed during the last decades. The literary norms should adapt to Kondum dialectal features. The orthography should also be revised as it is already actually being done by Shor writers and poets. Otherwise, it is difficult for the majority of Shors to read and understand written Shor.

Thus, we can state that despite the processes of national revival, the unfavourable factors that have led to the present-day demographic and sociolinguistic situation as well as to language shift still obtain. In addition, the Shors are the only major indigenous group who do not have any political autonomy or national administrative territory of their own in South Siberia. Thus, the language does not receive that legal support, no matter how insignificant it may be, that, for instance, Altai or Khakas have. The Shor language and culture remain acutely endangered.

Altai Turkic groups

A few “small-numbered” Turkic ethnic groups live in communities or dispersed on the territory of Mountainous Altai (mostly): the Teleut and the Telengit (alongside the *Altai-kizi*) represent Southern Altai ethnic groups (and corresponding linguistic varieties); the Kumandy, the Chalkan, and the Tuba are Northern Altai groups. None of the above-mentioned smaller groups is politically autonomous; for the most part, they live in industrially developed areas with predominantly non-Turkic populations (with the exception of the Telengit). Already in 1993 the Teleut and the Kumandy were included in the list of officially recognized *Indigenous Minority Peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East*²:

² They are officially called „indigenous small-numbered peoples“; an ethnic group must number no more than fifty thousand people in order to be considered “small-numbered”

this is a special category of ethnic minorities that receive help and assistance from the state; the Telengt, the Tuba and the Chalkan joined them in 2000. The sociolinguistic situation of the Altai ethnic minorities is characterized by multilingualism: Russian, literary Altai and their own idiom.

1. *The Kumandy*

The Kumandy, an indigenous Turkic-speaking ethnic group of South Siberia, were first mentioned in official documents of the Russian empire in 1628. Four Kumandy areas can be found in different Russian governmental documents and debt books from the seventeenth century: Kumandy, Solun, Čabat (Čeban) and Kersagal. At present, the Kumandy live in the Solton and Krasnogorsk Districts of the Altai Region, and in the Turačak District of the Altai Republic. The majority live in the cities of Bijsk and Gorno-Altajsk. A smaller group of Kumandy lives in the Taštapol and Novokuznetsk Districts of the Kemerovo Region, geographically belonging to Mountainous Shoria. According to where they lived, the Kumandy used to be listed as *altajcy* (Altai people), *tatary* (Tatar people), *šorcy* (Shor people) in their passports, but beginning in the early 1960s they were officially defined as Kumandy. In 1926, for the first and for the last time, the Kumandy were registered in the USSR population census as an independent ethnic group numbering 6334 people (Satlaev 2002: 108). There are no exact data on the total number of Kumandy at present. The Kumandy form an ethnic majority only in the Šatobal village of the Solton District of the Altai Republic – slightly over 50% (200 people). In 1993, the Kumandy were included in the list of officially recognized *Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East*. In 2000, they were included in the list of indigenous small-numbered peoples as a separate ethnic group by a Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation. This was meant to guarantee them certain economic, educational and cultural privileges and governmental support, but these privileges often cannot be realized.

The Kumandy language is neither written nor taught at school. It is greatly influenced by Russian on all language levels. There exist only scholarly publications of Kumandy text samples. The only brief description of Kumandy grammar was done by N. A. Baskakov (1972). In the 1980s-1990s, the phonology of the language was described by I. J. Seljutina (1983; 1998). Since Kumandy was until very recently considered an Altai dialect, almost no research on it exists. The language is highly endangered; it has never been sufficiently documented or described.

(Russian *maločislennyj*). Having come under the dominance of the descendants of migrants, mostly Russian-speaking ones, the indigenous “small-numbered” peoples are, in fact, both ethnic and linguistic minorities now.

The Kumandy have to use the modern Altai orthography, which is based on Altai literary norms. School instruction is conducted in Russian. In the 1930s, a Kumandy ABC book was published (Kalanakova & Filatova 1933), but very soon after that, literary Altai was introduced as a school subject instead of Kumandy.

The main feature of Kumandy ethnic development in the twentieth century was a gradual loss of their ethnic culture and language, though there are no exact data about the depth of this transformation. The language transmission has almost stopped. The older generations can speak Kumandy, but the younger generations have switched to Russian (Satlaev 2002: 110).

At present, the Kumandy do not have their own national administrative territory because they are dispersed among different administrative territories of the Russian Federation. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Kumandy elite undertook several attempts to revitalize their national culture. The Association of Kumandy People was created. A Kumandy-Russian phrase-book was published under the edition of F. A. Satlaev, who is Kumandy himself, now deceased (Tukmačeva & Tukmačev 1990). Kumandy holidays are held annually in Bijsk and in the Solton and Krasnogorsk Districts of the Altai Region. A Kumandy-Russian dictionary was composed by two Kumandy people and published at their own expense in 1995 (Petrušova & Tukmačev 1995). The authors are not linguists, and their methods can be criticized because their dictionary contains not only lexemes but also their case forms as separate entries. Nevertheless, this proves that the Kumandy themselves are aware of the threat to their language and culture and are eager to preserve them.

2. *The Tuba*

The Tuba inhabit the Turačak, Choj and Majma Districts of the Altai Republic along the banks of the River Bija. In 1989, they numbered 2749 people and constituted 2.5% of the entire population of Altai and 8.6% of the Altais (Makošev 2002). The economic and social processes in the Republic in the 1960s–1980s had a devastating effect on this ethnic group: loss of traditional ways of life and migration to bigger villages and cities because of the so-called politics of “villages without perspectives”. The latter meant that small villages were joined to bigger ones, and all their institutions and social establishments were closed (schools, post offices, shops, medical facilities, etc.). In this way, sixty of eighty-nine Tuba villages were abandoned and disappeared in the northern parts of the Altai Republic (Makošev 2002). In villages with a compact Tuba population literary Altai was taught till the 1960s. At present, it has been introduced again as a school subject. Tuba has never been written, nor taught at school.

After sociolinguistic research in this region³ had been suspended for decades, in 1999 and 2000 two expeditions were undertaken in the places with a compact Tuba population. The 1999 research was organized by the Gorno-Altajsk State University (Sarbaševa 2001). The 2000 research was conducted by the Institute of Philology, Siberian Division of the Russian Academy, Novosibirsk (Nikolina 2001). 62% of the Tuba people unexpectedly acknowledged Tuba as their native tongue in 2000, as compared to 44.7% in 1999. However, this could be wishful thinking rather than reality, since the actual command of the language is much lower: among 10- to 19-year-olds, only 50% of the respondents who consider Tuba their native tongue can communicate in Tuba and only 6% of them speak it fluently. Nevertheless, this fact is still symptomatic in that it shows that the community wants to preserve their language, or, at least, wishes to give that appearance. These research projects uncovered a great gap between the Tuba generations when it comes to language proficiency: the active use of the mother tongue is minimal in the younger age group and gradually rises the older the respondents are. In the group of 50- to 87-year-olds, practically everyone speaks Tuba fluently. All in all, about 38% of the Tuba people have a good command of their language, and an additional 21% can understand it. 41% of the Tuba have no command of the Tuba language. A passive command of literary Altai is also characteristic for the Tuba population: about 6% can speak literary Altai and 28.7% understand it. Although 19.7% of the Tuba learned literary Altai at school and 7.9 attended primary schools where it was the language of instruction, still 19% of those who learned Altai can read but not speak it, 15% can understand it, and 11.5 do not know literary Altai. The main language used for communication within the community and with other communities as well as the language used for writing is Russian: 73.7% use Russian when communicating with speakers of Southern Altai idioms, and 65.5% use it even to communicate with Northern Altai Turks. In the family, only 15% of the Tuba speak Tuba with their children. The research also showed that the community worries about this situation and would like to preserve the language: 72.7% of the respondents expressed this wish. The Tuba consider Tuba and Russian to be the most important languages for them. 83.9 of the respondents want school instruction in Tuba, 41.6% in Tuba and Russian, only 1.9% in literary Altai. The community wants radio and TV broadcasting in Tuba as well as Tuba books and newspapers.

³ Detailed sociolinguistic research on the indigenous peoples of Siberia was conducted in 1967-1970 by the Institute of Philology, the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy under the auspices of V. A. Avrorin, the head of the Department of the Languages of the Siberian Peoples at that time. Valentin Avrorin composed a questionnaire which was used in all the interviews with Siberian indigenous peoples. Unfortunately, the results of this research have never become accessible to the broader public; they can only be used by the members of the Russian Academy. The modern sociolinguistic research conducted by the Institute of Philology was also based on this questionnaire so that the results of both researches could be compared.

3. *The Chalkan*

The total number of Chalkan is unknown because since 1926 they were not mentioned as a separate ethnic group but were counted as Altais. In 2000, a sociolinguistic research project was conducted in the areas populated by the Chalkan by the Institute of Philology of the Siberian Division of the Russian Academy alongside similar research on the Tuba (Ozonova 2001). The research showed that the majority of the Chalkans are bi- and trilingual. The first language is usually Chalkan, the second Russian. 81.6% of the respondents consider Chalkan to be their mother tongue, and 71% can really speak it fluently. This is evidence of the language's vitality. 44.7% of Chalkan also speak Chalkan with the children in their families and only 26.9% prefer Russian. Their command of Russian is very good: 91.5% speak Russian fluently. Only older people have difficulties speaking Russian. They prefer speaking Russian with other Altais because Chalkan is very different from other Altai languages. Thus, Chalkan functions as the language of family communication and of communication within the community. Since Chalkan does not have a literary form and is not written, the Chalkan use Russian in written communication. At school, Chalkan children learn literary Altai. They consider it a foreign language because it differs greatly from their idiom. The majority of Chalkan wish Chalkan to be taught at school as a school subject.

4. *The Teleut*

The Teleut are one of the smallest ethnic groups among the Siberian peoples. At present there are approximately two and a half thousand Teleut living in the southern part of Western Siberia in the cities of the Kemerovo Region, Altai Region and Altai Republic. Most Teleut are rural inhabitants: almost two thousand of them live in the villages Bekovo, Čeluxoevo, Verxovskaja, Šanda, Novo-Bačaty, and Teleuty. These villages are situated on the territory of the Belovsk, Gur'evsk and Novokuznetsk Districts of the Kemerovo Region. This group is called *Bachat Teleut* according to their main place of settlement on the banks of the Bolšoj and Malyj Bačat, a left tributary of the Inja River, which flows into the Ob River. At the beginning of the 20th century the Teleut groups were more numerous. Now they have become part of the Kalmaks of the north-west part of the Kemerovo Region who accepted Islam, the Čergin Teleut of the Altai Republic who have accepted the Altai ethnic identity, or the Zarinsk Teleut in the Altai Region who have become Russified (Funk 1993).

As early as the 1970s, Galina Fisakova came to the conclusion that Teleut is an independent language and not an Altai dialect (1979). However, the contemporary Teleut grammar and lexicon have not yet been sufficiently described, although scientific research on Teleut already goes back about two centuries. Sys-

tematic research on Teleut began with the onset of missionary activity by the so-called Altai Orthodox Mission. The Russian Orthodox Church began propagating Christianity among Siberian indigenous peoples as soon as Siberia became a part of the Russian Empire. The Altai Mission, founded in 1828, spread its influence over the territory of Mountainous Shoria, Mountainous Altai, and the Minusinsk Region, where Turkic-speaking indigenous peoples of Siberia (the Altais, Shors, Teleut, and Kumandy) lived. The first heads of the Altai Mission, Father Makarij (Gluxarev) and Father Stefan (Landyšev), founded the “new Siberian mission” which was based on the philosophy of the importance of studying the languages, traditions, and beliefs of aboriginal peoples. The Altai missionaries preached in the native languages of Siberia’s aborigines. They translated Christian literature into Altai, Shor, Teleut, and Kumandy. These translations were made with the help of priests who came from among the indigenous peoples, and were based on a deep knowledge of Siberia’s mythological traditions and languages. The Altai missionaries published books in the indigenous languages of the Siberian people, founded primary and secondary schools, and religious higher schools where they trained national priests and teachers for national schools. All this was preceded by long-term “field work” and intensive scientific research, conducted by the linguists of the Altai Mission. The results of the research were presented in the *Grammar of the Altai language (Grammatika altajskogo jazyka)*, published in Kazan’ (anon. 1869). A Turkic-Russian dictionary of the Turkic languages of South Siberia followed a few years later (Verbickij 1884). Thus, Teleut was even the first literary language in Mountainous Altai due to the fact that the Teleut were baptized first. However, being the language of an ethnic minority, it could not establish itself as a literary variety for the whole Turkic-speaking population of Mountainous Altai .

The language is acutely endangered (Nasilov 2002: 177-179). The processes of language shift are proceeding very rapidly: in 1979, only 56.1% of the Teleut spoke Teleut at home (Korusenko 1980). Since 1980, nobody has done sociolinguistic research on the Teleut. However, according to the Teleut’s own estimate, the situation has become even worse. Although Teleut is now taught as a subject at school in the village of Bekovo, there is little interest in this course on the part of the Teleut. The problem is that there are no trained teachers of Teleut. Some Teleut students are now studying at the Department of the Shor Language and Folklore, the Kuzbass State Pedagogical Academy; they are being trained as teachers of Teleut, but their knowledge of Teleut leaves much to be desired.

The Teleut were also included in the list of officially recognized Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East in 1993 and in the List of Indigenous Minorities of the Russian Federation by the Decree of the Russian Government No. 255 from 24 March 2000. According to the latter, the Teleut are estimated to number 3000 people. Thus, they are officially considered to be an ethnic minority that requires help and assistance from the state.

5. *The Telengit*

The Telengit were officially recognized as a separate ethnic group only in 2000 by the Decree of the Russian Government No. 255 from 24 March 2000. Consequently, earlier censuses classified them as Altai. According to the *List of Indigenous Minorities of the Russian Federation*, there are 15,984 Telengit. In 1990, the Russian Legislation began a discussion on the Indigenous Minorities. This stimulated the processes of ethnic consolidation and ethnic revival. In 1995, the Association of Southern Altai People *Telengit* was founded. The Northern Altai ethnic groups had already founded their own association in 1992. These developments contradicted the official policy of the Altai Republic which aimed at consolidating all Turkic-speaking ethnic groups in Mountainous Altai into an Altai nation. On the other hand, the ethnic revival stoked the interest of the broader public and of scientists in these groups and their long ethnic history.

The ethnonym *tele* is found in Chinese sources beginning in the fifth-sixth centuries. Until the seventeenth century, a Telengit-Teleut macro-ethnic group inhabited practically the whole of Southern Altai. In the beginning of the sixteenth century a compact group of Teleut moved to the territories adjacent to the southern reaches of the Ob River. They became Russian citizens and gradually formed a separate ethnic group. At the same time, Mongol tribes moved to the Southern and Central Altai and took part in the formation of the Telengit and *Altai-kiži* ethnic groups. In the south-eastern and southern parts of Mountainous Altai, an ethnic group of Telengits has formed who have preserved the ethno-cultural heritage of the previous epochs (Šerstova 1999: 65-75).

The Telengit populate the areas where the territories of Russia, Mongolia and Kazakhstan meet. They have preserved their traditional beliefs, traditional culture and their language, which is very close to literary Altai. Shamanism still plays a very important role in their ethnic culture. A peculiar feature in the areas where they live is the coexistence of Shamanism with practically all of the major world religions – Buddhism, Islam and Christianity. The national revival is now also connected with a revival of Orthodoxy among the Teleut. This movement is headed by Father Makarij – an Orthodox priest, himself a Teleut, whose family preserved the Orthodox religion during the decades of oppression. Beginning in the 1990s, traditional institutions of power (councils of the elders) were gradually restored by the Telengit community, similar to what was done by the *Altai-kiži* community. For example, in 1995, at a meeting of the representatives of all Telengit living in the village of Muxor-Tarxata in the Koš-Agač District, the elders (Telengit *zajsan*) of all the clans (Telengit *söök*) were elected. At presidential elections in the Altai Republic in 1997, there were more than ten candidates; the majority of them had been delegated by the clan structures (Oktjabr'skaja 2003).

Some conclusions

As we have seen, all the ethnic groups of the Altai Republic are trying to restore or to revive their traditional cultures and to preserve their languages. Today, they have a historic opportunity to realize these goals thanks to the assistance that the Russian State proclaims to give to indigenous ethnic minorities. However, ethnic revival in the Altai Republic is also connected with the growth of ethno-social tension. The republic numbers about eighty-five-thousand Turkic-speaking people altogether, which amounts to only thirty percent of its total population. As a result of the Northern and Southern Altai Turks' revived ethnic self-identification, the *Altai-kizi* ethnic group is also in the process of becoming an ethnic minority itself. Altai national leaders are very much worried that the disintegration of the Altai nation would bring about the disintegration of the republic in the long run. National sentiments were especially sensitive before the 2002 Russian census. There were rumours that the republic would be joined to the Altai Region and lose its national sovereignty. The Russian minister in charge of ethnic affairs had to come to Gorno-Altajsk, the capital of the Altai Republic, in order to reassure the Altai peoples that no such plans existed (Oktjabr'skaja 2003). The census has taken place; the republic still exists and is rapidly developing its economy and social structures. But the problems of its indigenous minorities have not yet been solved; this especially concerns the ethnic groups whose ethnic cultures and languages are acutely endangered. Gorno-Altajsk experts see a way out for them in switching to literary Altai rather than to Russian if they want to preserve their Turkic identity, since the prospects for their own linguistic varieties are not so promising. According to this view, literary Altai should become a uniting factor for all the Turkic-speaking peoples of Altai (Tybykova 2004). There are no resources (or no political will?) to introduce the mother tongues into school education at least as curricular subjects – no teachers, no teaching materials, no scientific foundation for creating teaching materials since the languages have not been sufficiently described. Therefore, it is put forward that they should learn literary Altai, but that during the Altai lessons they should always contrast their own linguistic variety with literary Altai (Tybykova 2004). While this could work well enough for the Telengit, whose language is not further from literary Altai than some dialects of the *Altai-kizi*, it would certainly not be possible even for Teleut, to say nothing of the Northern Altai linguistic varieties that are closer linguistically to Shor and Khakas than to literary Altai.

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