

AGO KÜNNAP (Tartu)

ACQUISITION AND FORFEITURE OF URALIC LANGUAGES  
BY THE YOUNGEST AGE COHORTS IN RUSSIA

The perspectives of a language depend upon the children's language acquisition and the further retention of the acquired language. In the following I am trying to give a certain picture about the situation of Uralic languages in Russia in this respect.

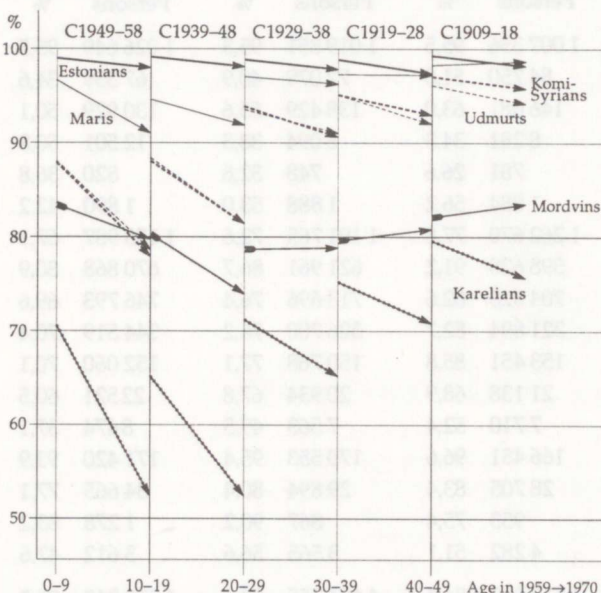
For a clearer survey I will begin by presenting the data of the last four censuses of Uralic peoples in the Soviet Union, revealing the total number of each of the peoples and the percentage of the speakers of the national language as their mother tongue (see more closely Künnap 1992):

	1959		1970		1979		1989	
	Persons	%	Persons	%	Persons	%	Persons	%
Estonians	988 616	95,2	1 007 356	95,5	1 019 851	95,3	1 026 649	95,5
Finns	92 717	59,5	84 750	51,0	77 079	40,9	67 359	34,6
Karelians	167 278	71,3	146 081	63,0	138 429	55,6	130 929	50,1
Wepses	16 374	46,1	8 281	34,3	8 094	38,3	12 501	50,8
Ingrians	1 062	34,7	781	26,6	748	32,6	820	36,8
Samis	1 792	69,9	1 884	56,2	1 888	53,0	1 890	42,2
Mordvins	1 285 116	78,1	1 262 670	77,8	1 191 765	72,6	1 153 987	67,1
Maris	504 205	95,1	598 628	91,2	621 961	86,7	670 868	80,9
Udmurts	624 794	89,1	704 328	82,6	713 696	76,4	746 793	69,6
Komi-Syrians	287 027	89,3	321 894	82,7	326 700	76,2	344 519	70,4
Komi-Permiaks	143 901	87,6	153 451	85,8	150 768	77,1	152 060	70,1
Khanties	19 410	77,0	21 138	68,9	20 934	67,8	22 521	60,5
Mansis	6 449	59,2	7 710	52,4	7 563	49,5	8 474	37,1
Hungarians	154 738	97,2	166 451	96,6	170 553	95,4	171 420	93,9
Nenetsets	23 007	84,7	28 705	83,4	29 894	80,4	34 665	77,1
Nganasans	748	93,4	953	75,4	867	90,2	1 278	83,2
Selkups	3 768	50,6	4 282	51,1	3 565	56,6	3 612	47,6
<b>Together</b>	<b>4 321 002</b>	<b>86,5</b>	<b>4 519 343</b>	<b>84,4</b>	<b>4 484 355</b>	<b>80,4</b>	<b>4 550 345</b>	<b>76,2</b>
Livonians							226	43,8
Enetsets							209	45,5
<b>All together</b>							<b>4 550 780</b>	<b>76,2</b>

I will also continue revealing an analysis and a relevant figure by Seppo Lallukka from Lallukka 1990 : 198–199. In his analysis Lallukka has considered only four bigger Uralic peoples living in Russia: Maris, Komis, Udmurts and Mordvins (whereby Komis, in fact, means Komi-Syrians). In one of Lallukka's earlier analysis we can find a figure which deals with all the respective data of the Soviet census on Uralic peoples, i.e., in addition to those four peoples mentioned above a reference has also been made to Estonians and Karelians (Lallukka 1982 : 60). I will add these to the 1990 figure by Lallukka.

So, in 1990 Lallukka writes that "it is possible to monitor the development by cohorts only for the 1959–70 intercensal period and it is likely that the picture that emerges is only a rough indication of the true cohort-percentage of Komis aged 10–19 years in 1959 who have stated that the Komi language is their native tongue and compared it with the percentage of Komis who made the same statement in 1970 and were 20–29 years of age". He says that in the figure "the slope of the arrows depicts the changes in the native-language retention rate from 1959 to 1970 by birth cohorts. At the top of the figure are shown the birth years included in each of the cohorts and at the bottom, on the horizontal axis, the x-coordinates of the tails of the arrows indicate the age of the persons belonging to each cohort at the moment of the 1959 census. The y-coordinates of the tails, in turn, show for 1959 the percentage of persons for each cohort who claimed the nationality's indigenous language as their native tongue. The y-coordinates of the arrowheads show the analogous percentage for the year 1970.

The monitoring of the cohorts discloses that in all the nationalities the steepest declines in native-language retention were in the two youngest cohorts, i.e. among people who by 1970 were approaching or were in their teens, or who were young adults. Among the older, those who had passed their 20th birthday by the 1959 census, the declines in native-language retention are much smaller. [---] Even



**LALLUKKA'S FIGURE: The Percentage of People Declaring the Language of Their Own Nationality as the Native Language: by Cohorts, 1959 and 1970**

in the youngest cohorts over 90% of Maris maintained the traditional native tongue through the 1960s. [---] In the two youngest Komi and Udmurts cohorts the decline is quite sharp, from 7 to 11 percentage points... Finally, the Mordvin arrows clearly score the lowest in Figure...: they oscillate on both sides of the 80% level."

In addition, it appears that the decline in the use of the traditional native tongue in the two youngest cohorts has still been greater in the not so numerous Karelians. The data about Estonians, then belonging to the Soviet Union, were, in fact, presented by way of comparison as an example about stability.

Applying the coordinate system of the figure by Lallukka I will present the points rendered possible by the 1970 census data to accentuate the percentage of the use of the traditional native tongue by the peoples mentioned above, and in addition to them the two youngest cohorts of Komi-Permiaks, Khanties, Mansis and Nenetses.

It appears in the figure that in the youngest cohort (0-9) of Maris, Komi-Syrians, Udmurts and Karelians the level of proficiency of the national language as the native language is considerably lower in 1970 than that of the youngest cohort of 1959, being approximately located at the point where the youngest cohort of 1959 fell in the forfeiture of their mother tongue by 1970. Or, in other words: in 1970 the youngest cohort of these peoples only began from where the youngest cohort of 1959 had declined by 1970. In Estonians and Mordvins the youngest cohorts of 1959 and 1970 were more or less equal by their respective levels. It is quite unexpected in Mordvins, its reason unknown.

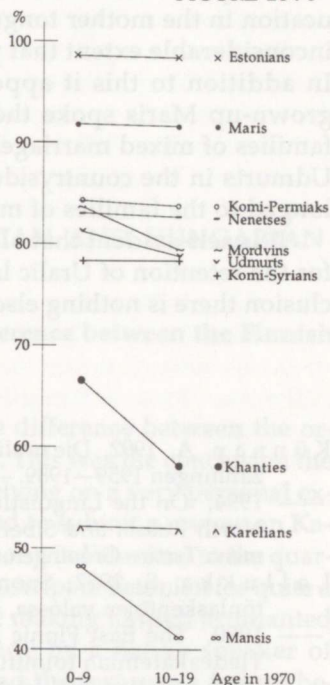
Considering the national language as the native language proficiency in 1970 in the two younger cohorts (0-9 and 10-19), the language proficiency of the older cohort in Maris, Komi-Syrians, Udmurts and Mordvins is somewhat lower in comparison with the younger one. The difference is significantly smaller in Komi-Permiaks but in Khanties and Mansis it is significantly bigger.

Wishing to attain a more complete survey about the forfeiture of Uralic languages in Russia, we should consider the proportion of the youngest cohorts as related to the total number of the respective population.

I will make an attempt to display the proportion on the basis of available materials. First, we know the following percentages of the two youngest cohorts of 1959 and 1970 (as compared with those of Russians) (Lallukka 1982 : 92). For further comparisons we have to consider the proportion of the age group 0-15 of 1959 and 1970 as the published data would not afford anything else (Lallukka 1992 : 10).

	1959		1970			1970	1989
	0-9	10-19	0-9	10-19		0-15	0-15
Estonians	14,1	14,4	15,8	12,1	Karelians	19,6	16,6
Karelians	19,6	10,8	11,9	15,6	Mordvins	27,6	22,1
Mordvins	22,9	14,9	18,8	17,9	Maris	36,5	28,7
Maris	28,6	14,4	27,0	20,6	Komi-Syrians	33,4	24,6
Komi-Syrians	26,9	13,5	23,2	20,1	Komi-Permiaks	34,0	25,8
Udmurts	28,0	14,2	23,8	20,5	Udmurts	33,1	25,1
Russians	21,9	15,1	18,2	17,5	Khanties	45,5	33,5
					Mansis	44,9	31,9
					Nenetses	44,1	37,8-44,8
					Russians	28,0	24,5

FIGURE 1970



As can be observed, the importance of younger age groups tends to be falling, but yet in the majority of Uralic peoples it has been relatively big and remained so (cf. the data about Russians). So, as a rule, the age groups which are the largest, are losing their old mother tongue quickest of all.

According to Lallukka's data, the children of Uralic peoples in Russia attend, in part at least, nursery schools of their mother tongue, acquire their education in the mother tongue or learn the mother tongue at school to such an inconsiderable extent that practically it need not be taken into account at all. In addition to this it appears that in 1985 only a little more than 40% of grown-up Maris spoke the Mari language to their children. In 1968 in the families of mixed marriages the Udmurt language was used only by 10,5% of Udmurts in the countryside and by 1% in town. In 1979 20% of Udmurts belonged to the families of mixed marriages (Lallukka 1990 : 211—212, 240).

It is self-evident that all the above-said will not promise any perspectives for the retention of Uralic languages in Russia (see also Künnap 1994). In conclusion there is nothing else to be done but hoping for the best fear the worst.

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АГО КЮННАП (Тарту)

#### УСВАИВАНИЕ И УТРАЧИВАНИЕ ЯЗЫКА ДВУМЯ МЛАДШИМИ ВОЗРАСТНЫМИ ГРУППАМИ У УРАЛЬСКИХ НАРОДОВ РОССИИ

Усваивание детьми языка и его сохранение в течение последующей жизни является решающим фактором в судьбе языка.

Автор приводит диаграмму Сеппо Лаллукка, из которой видно, что две младшие возрастные группы (0—9 и 10—19) у наиболее многочисленных уральских народов России очень быстрыми темпами утрачивают свой национальный язык в качестве родного. Опубликованные неполные данные переписей населения СССР позволяют предположить, что эта тенденция свойственна большинству уральских языков в России. Далее в статье показывается, что доля двух младших возрастных групп у большинства уральских народов России несколько сокращается, но остается по-прежнему сравнительно большой.

Возможность посещать хотя бы частично своеязычные дошкольные детские учреждения, обучаться на родном языке или учить родной язык в школе у этих народов практически отсутствует. В таких условиях есть все основания беспокоиться о сохранности уральских языков в России.