

Khanty Language and Lower School Education: Native, Second or Foreign Language?

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Preliminary Remarks

At the outset I would like to point out that I myself have never worked as a teacher in a school, but have for many years taught my native language—Finnish—to students in Germany. For the majority of my students, Finnish is a foreign language. About 20–30% of them once lived in Finland or have one or two Finnish parents (usually the mother). Of course, this fact alone does not mean that Finnish automatically becomes the native language of these students. Even in cases where both parents are Finnish, the child's native language is never considered to be Finnish if the child himself does not speak that language at home. In this case, the key to determining the native language is to ask whether or not at least one of the parents speaks Finnish with the child.

“The Khanty language is spoken by the Khantys, who live in separate groups in the vast territory of northwest Siberia along the Rivers Ob and Irtysh and their tributaries...” (Nemysova 1988: 3). The Khanty number about 21,000 people. It is thought that about 30% of the Khantys are native speakers of the Khanty language (Neroznak 1994: 60). The reality is such that, for example, in Berezovo, a town of about 8,000, I met very few young Khantys who still knew the Khanty language, and as for children speaking Khanty—I didn't meet any. The situation is different in Tegi, a village of 600 lying 6 kilometers to the north of Berezovo. It seems to me that, there, all the Khantys have more or less mastered the Khanty language. While not everyone is exposed to the literary form of Khanty during their formal education, in Tegi, even 20–30 year-olds and many children speak a Khanty dialect with particularities which distinguish it from the literary language. Of course, solid knowledge of the language is most closely linked with the home, and especially with grandparents who speak the Khanty language.

General Criteria for Knowledge and Study of Language

For a given language, we can determine whether or not the language is native, second, or foreign by noting a few criteria and levels of knowledge of that language. For this task I will use the following definitions:

Definition of native (first) language:

“Native language, in the strict sense of the term, refers to that variant (sociolect or dialect, P. J.-K.) of the language which the child learns at home, from parents, siblings and relatives. This language indicates the child’s membership in a specific linguistic milieu. Also implied, in a broader definition of the word, are those regional and social linguistic variants found in the territory of the given people, as well as (in this case purely symbolically) that variant which is used in school administration and the means of mass communications.” (Vähäpassi 1980: 158; this and all other translations from Finnish by author).

Definition of a second language:

In the beginning the term “second language” properly was used to mean “all languages which one learned to speak after the first (native) language” (Sajavaara 1980: 116). Thirteen years later this definition was made more precise in the following way:

“In class, outside of their linguistic environment, children study a foreign language, while in direct contact with the language of society, the bearers of that language, children learn a second language” (Latomaa and Tuomela 1993: 239).

The difference between foreign and second language can be illustrated in the following diagram (see Latomaa and Tuomela 1993: 243).

Finnish language >> foreign language	Finnish language >> second language
in class not in Finland	in Finland “on the street”

Criteria in the Knowledge and Study of Khanty Language

We will turn now to the Khanty language. Khanty language abroad, for example, at Hamburg University, is of course studied as a foreign language. The status of Khanty language in the territory where the Khanty themselves

live can be schematically illustrated in the following manner:

Khanty language >> foreign language	Khanty language >> native, second or foreign language?
abroad (for example, Hamburg)	in the places where Khanty live (for example, Berezovo)

I can only answer this question in relation to the Northern Khantys, i.e. living in and around the village of Berezovo, because I only worked in this region and studied only the dialects spoken in this territory. I would like to limit the topic here to questions about defining the character of Khanty language for children who did not speak the language before they began to attend school.

Which dialect does it make sense to discuss in the case of my visit to a third-grade class in the village of Berezovo, in which even the Khanty students had no grasp of the Khanty language? Weak knowledge of the language was noticeable, because only a few students were able to name in Khanty some of the main words in Khanty society, such as *xon* “boat”, *вуды* “reindeer”, *xov* “house”. It is important to point out that in the given class, in addition to Khanty children, there are also Russians, Tatars, Mansi and others. It seems to me that it is important to point out also that the weak knowledge of the language is in no way attributable to the work of the Khanty teachers.

Teaching Khanty Language

In the village of Berezovo, Khanty language classes are offered four days a week from the first through the ninth grades. Two sections are taught in the Kazymski dialect and two in the Sredneobski dialect (Svetlana Gyndysheva, conversation). In the village of Tegi the choice of dialect usually depends on which dialect the teacher speaks (*Kazymski* or *Shuryshkarski*). Together, the Khanty language consists of five literary languages, two of which are based on the Kazymski and Shuryshkarski dialects (*govor*) (Nemysova 1988: 7). It seems unimportant in this paper to ask which variants of the Khanty language can be considered dialects (*dialekt*), patois (*govor*) or dialects (*narechiye*). However, it should be pointed out that the Berezovski dialect is located geo-

graphically and phonetically between these three dialects. The following examples show the differences between these dialects (which are not very significant):

Phonetic Differences:

Russian	жить	несты	лес
Kazymyski*	вэлты	тэты	вэнт
Shuryshkarski*	улаты	туты	ут
Sredneobski*	утта	тута	унт
Berezovski	вудты	туты	вунт
English	to live	to carry	forest

* Nemysova (1988: 8–9)

Morphological Differences:

Morphological differences can be detected in the declination of personal pronouns. The following two tables (so far there is no standardized Khanty orthography) demonstrate that in the Kazymyski patois (or *dialekt*) there are three numerical categories for personal pronouns (singular, dual, plural), while in the Berezovski dialect, the younger speakers do not know and therefore do not use the dual category. Another difference is that in the Kazymyski patois (or *dialekt*), personal pronouns have three cases (nominative, dative, accusative) while the Berezovski dialect has only two personal pronoun cases (nominative, while the dative and accusative coincide and the function of the dative case can be additionally expressed with the help of the guiding case—with suffix *-a*).

Berezovski dialect:

nominative	dative/accusative	Russian	English
ма	манем(а)	я	I
наң	наңен(а)	ты	you
лув	лувел(а)	он, она	he, she
муң	муңев(а)	мы	we
нын	ныннын(а)	вы	you (plural)
лын, лый	лыел(а)	они	they

Kazymski patois (Nemysova 1988: 90):

Склонение личных местоимений

Число	Лицо	Названия падежей		
		именительный	дательный	винительный
Ед. ч.	1-е	ма	манэм	манат(-ты)
	2-е	нанг	нанген	нангат(-ты)
	3-е	лув	лувел	луват(-ты)
Дв. ч.	1-е	мин	минэмн	минат(-ты)
	2-е	нын	нынан	нынат(-ты)
	3-е	лын	лынан	лынат(-ты)
Мн. ч.	1-е	мунг	мунгев	мунгат(-ты)
	2-е	нын	нынан	нынат(-ты)
	3-е	льв	львел	льват(-ты)

Lexical differences:

Already in the simple names of numbers a few differences can be detected, for example, in Kazymski dialect *нивал* (eight), *ярьянг* (nine) (Nemysova and Veniaminova 1987: 75), Berezovski dialect *нийл*, *ярт-ял*. Larger differences are found in complex names. The following extract from the lesson “Substantive Noun” can be taken as an example (Kazymski dialect: Sengepov and Nemysova 1994a: 27).

In English the text means “What time of year is shown in the drawing? Where do reindeer herders live?”

Kazymski dialect:

Муй пура хурн верм?
Хута вэддят вўлы шавиты ёх?

Berezovski dialect:

Муй порайн хорн верум?
Хота вуддыт вуды хотын
яхты хояты?

Compiling Primers and Books for Study

If we now look at the textbooks and readers used in the first through fourth grades on the basis of Kazymiski and Shuryshkarski dialects, we see that they are all one language. The Finnish term for textbooks such as these is “teaching grammar” (Keravuori 1992: 50) and they are used for study in school for native Finnish-speaking children. This means that not only the reading text itself is written in Khanty, but also the separate exercises and all grammatical explanations. For example “*Каргинкаит ямс нух ванталн. Вопросаӓт щирн предложенияит вератты*” (Sengepov and Nemysova 1994a: 54), which in English means: “Examine the pictures closely. Compose interrogative sentences.” Another example: the following exercise explains that in Khanty verbs may be singular, dual or plural. The singular is used to deal with a single object: “*хот омӓс*” (the house is being built). In the dual, with two objects: “*хотӓн омӓс*” (two houses are being built). In the plural, with three or more objects: “*хотӓт омӓс*” (houses are being built). (Sengepov and Nemysova 1994b :55]

Thus, in terms of classroom instruction, all of these textbooks are composed as though the students were native Khanty speakers from the very beginning. On the other hand, in other books, grammatical explanations and the corresponding exercises are in some lessons composed as if the students in the third class still did not sufficiently know Khanty language. Their exercises require students to conjugate verbs like “*ма аридам...*” (I sing, you sing, he sings, we sing, etc.), “*нумӓсты*” (to think) and “*верты*” (to do) and to use these verbs to construct 3 or 4 sentences:

Луӓталн. Глаголаӓта вопросаӓт понаты. Хӓншалн.

Единственной число	Двойственной число	Множественной число
ма ари дам наӓ ари дан луӓ ари д	мин ари дман нын ари дтан лын ари дӓн	мӓӓ ари дув нын ари дты луӓ ари дӓт

Нӓпека аӓт хӓшман тӓм глаголаӓт числаит сирн вералн: сютсыты, нумӓсты, верты, уйтты. Вераты 3–4 предложение тӓмисӓӓт пилн.

(Sengepov and Nemysova 1994b: 55)

Thematic textbooks and readers for the first through fourth years of study have been put together differently. I would like to demonstrate this by showing just two examples. The first passage is from a book for additional reading (Ledkova and Seburowa 1988: 8) and addresses the question (V. Mayakovski): “What is good and what is bad?” (Муй вер ям па муй вер атум?). The boy approaches his father and asks about this, and the father responds that the boy who has a dirty face (and is guilty of other deeds) is the worst child, while the boy who cleans his teeth (and exhibits other behaviors) is a very good child. At this symposium we have learned from other participants that texts with similar contents are found in textbooks for a number of languages of the small numbered peoples of the north.

**Муй вер ям
па муй вер атум.**

Ай пухие
 асел хуся юхтас
па пухие иньсисас:
— Муй вер ям
па муй вер атум?
Пух ат кинься
 питы ки,
хэлы веншалн ул, —
шоп си,
 сит
 мет атум
ай няврэм элсуха.
И ки пуха
 лоньсях мосл
па пенгк люхатты рав,
там пух
 шенгк ям няврэм,
верл тэса.

(Ledkova and Seburowa 1988: 8)

In the second text (Lazarev et al. 1984: 6) a lesson on traditions and clothing asks, for example, what time of year is shown in the picture, how many girls are shown, how many boys, what are they doing and who arrived with them.

Хор вангалн. Вопросыга ястаты.

Муйкем тал пора хор ханшим?
Тата муйкем эви? Муйкем пох?
Холта лув ёхытсыт?
Муй лув верлыт?
Лув пилэлна муй ёхтыс?
Муйсыр рых наң куртан лепна энымлыт?
Эвет нэмна мии па хор сирна потыр вераты.

* * *

Муң потрев предложенияита ортасл.
Предложенияит ясңыта ортаслыт.

(Lazarev et al. 1984: 6)

Conclusion

(1) If a student already has a strong command of the Khanty language, this means that he or she has been speaking it at home with parents or others from a very early age. In this case, in school he will be truly studying his native language, in the literal sense of that word. For example, this student has an equal command of Khanty and Russian. This summer in the village of Tegi I met with such a six year-old boy, who lives with his grandmother. In this case, studying the Kazymski or Shuryshkarski dialect in school only enriches his knowledge of the language.

(2) If the student speaks a little in one dialect of the Khanty language, and understands when grandmother or grandfather speak with him in Khanty (in the majority of such cases the student's parents either do not speak Khanty or do not even understand it), then it is quite possible that in school he could learn one or even two literary variants of Khanty (Kazymski, Shuryshkarski or Sredneobski). Then, of course, there arises a serious danger, that of mixing the different dialects, especially in terms of phonetics. For example: "I returned home" is "ма юхи юхытсум" in the Kazymski dialect, and "ма әху әхтсум" in the Berezovski dialect. The student's success will depend first of all on his personal interest and motivation. In my opinion it is very rare for Khanty language to become stronger than Russian and take on the latter's functions. Usually Russian remains native (first) while Khanty is second.

(3) If the student never hears a single Khanty word at home or in social circles, then Khanty is a foreign language for him, just the same as, for example, English or German. In this situation for the teacher of Khanty, for whom Khanty is a native language, there is discussion about the methods of teaching Khanty as a foreign language.

One could say that in such cases Khanty language is a foreign language for both the students and parents alike, and that the student studies it only in school. In such cases, students and their parents have much more contact with English than with Khanty, because they see so many English language television programs which are poorly dubbed so that the English is still audible. Then, the dialect of the school course has absolutely no significance. This is the most common situation that I encountered.

It is possible that the only difference between these students and the ones at Hamburg University is that the Khanty students were familiar with the Russian orthography from very early on, while the German students were not. This has its source in the very first lesson "ма манлум, наӈ манлын, лув манл ..." ("I go, you go, he goes"):

Present

ма манлум | mā manlum—I go
 наӈ манлын | naŋ manlən—you go
 лув манл | luw manl—he goes
 муӈ манлу | muŋ manlu—we go
 нын манлыты | nīn manlətī
 —you go
 лын манлыт | līn manlət—they go

Past

ма мантсум | mā mantsum—I went
 наӈ мантсын | naŋ mantɕən—you went
 лув манс | luw mans—he went
 муӈ мантсу | muŋ mantsu—we went
 нын мантсыты | nīn mantsətī
 —you went
 лын мантсыт | līn mantsət—they went

(Jääsalmi-Krüger and Novyukhov 1997: 68)

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