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Contact and Shift: Colonization and Urbanization in the Arctic

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1. Introduction

Language shift, “the gradual displacement of one language by another in the lives of the community members” (Dorian 1982: 44), is inherently a contact phenomenon. Contact with shift results in the loss of the language one shifts from. It is largely unidirectional and follows a basic pattern whereby the L1 of speakers, an ancestral or local, indigenous language, becomes recessive and is replaced by another language, often a majority national and colonial language. Shift is typically found in unbalanced bi- or multilingual contact ecologies, where there is a power differential of some kind, with power understood broadly to encompass political, social, and economic power, as well as numerical power (in terms of numbers of speakers). Mufwene’s (2001, 2003) theory of language evolution would argue that this is, indeed, predictable, as part of a natural process of language change. (See e.g., Mufwene 2017 for robust discussion of the issues and implications for linguistic theory.) Although this sweeping generalization misses many of the particular specifics of language shift, it captures the overall picture that is represented in any number of works on the issue of language shift, endangerment, and loss worldwide (Krauss 1992). Massive language shift today is reshaping the global linguistic landscape, with a large percentage of the world’s languages being replaced by a relatively small number of languages.

Moreover, despite the fact that this broad overview describes the overall situation of language endangerment, there is still much that is unexplained. A theory of language contact should be able to account for and

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predict potential language shift, as well as the opposite scenario, reversing language shift (revitalization). Both scenarios involve language contact: in the one, contact results in shift; in the other, efforts are made to undo the effects of contact. However, in most cases both linguistic processes involved in shift and the social factors that foster it are still in place, unless radical changes are made. But in general, reversing language shift occurs in the very setting that encouraged it in the first place, although speaker attitudes or ideologies may have changed. A model of contact ecologies should be able to predict what kinds of scenarios and factors are likely to lead to shift, and which foster revitalization.

Colonization is a major factor contributing to language shift. To this I would add urbanization. Although arguably urbanization is at some level a result, or at least an extension, of colonization, heuristically it may ultimately be more insightful to approach it as a factor in its own right, given that urban language ecologies differ from small-scale rural ones, in terms of population size and, in many modern cities, the number of languages. Are cities places of language shift and assimilation, do certain metrolingual lingua francas emerge specifically because of the social dynamics of city life, or does “metrolingual multitasking” (Pennycook & Otsuji 2015) support multilingual language practices, and thus language sustainability?

My answer is yes: urbanization imposes a kind of hierarchy of language practices determined by a combination of language politics and power, speaker population size and density. Although cities may be hotbeds of multilingual practices, there is little space for minority indigenous languages. To the extent that cities create spaces that facilitate multilingual practices, the spaces they afford do not generally support small-scale speaker communities. In fact, what is often referred to as *superdiversity* (Blommaert & Rampton 2011) is the result of immigrant small-scale speaker communities that are marginalized socioeconomically (Salikoko Mufwene, p.c., March 5, 2019). The case studies here illustrate several outcomes: homogenization of different varieties and erasure (Sami, Oslo), increased contact with the colonizing language (Nuuk), and erasure of differences in support of a pan-indigenous identity (Yakutsk). There are exceptions, of course, and these are worth studying closely, as they provide insight into strategies for language sustainability and vitality in the face of the kinds of stressors that foster shift.

Recent work on small-scale multilingual communities argues that these communities are characterized by stable, balanced bi-/multilingualism practiced in spaces “not governed by domain specialization and hierarchical relationships of the different named languages and lects used in them, but by deeply rooted social practices within a meaningful geographic setting” (Lüpke 2016: 35). Lüpke notes that this kind of small-scale multilingualism is found in places that have not, or have only recently, been settled by Western populations and ideologies of nation states and language standardization (p. 41). In

contrast to Western-style formal economies, which require proficiency in the dominant language for access and prosperity, the small-scale economies of the African context have helped support maintenance of local languages. Within the Arctic context, small-scale communities persisted in some places long after colonization because of their relative isolation, and in part because the Arctic climate acted as a deterrent to settlement by colonizers, and the vitality of indigenous languages was maintained long after colonization, as was indigenous multilingualism. Nonetheless, they were embedded in hierarchical social structures, with the colonizers at the top. This suggests a need to define different kinds of small-scale communities in accordance with differing colonization patterns and social organizations.

10.3. Finally, despite all the dire predictions about language shift and loss, it is worth noting that a significant number of communities of various sizes, in various parts of the world, are working to revitalize use of their languages. This speaks to the importance, symbolic or otherwise, of language to these communities, and suggests that a theory of language contact in endangered language communities needs to account for an internal renewal of the minority language.

1.1. Language Contact in the Arctic

To illustrate these claims, I examine language contact and changing contact ecologies in the circumpolar Arctic. This part of the world is an interesting testing ground for comparative studies because it includes eight nation states (Canada, Denmark, Finland, Russia, Norway, Sweden, and the United States) and several groups of indigenous peoples who live across transnational borders. It provides an opportunity to examine the effects of differing colonization patterns, as well as more recent trends in migration, urbanization, and globalization, on the outcomes of language contact.

The population density in the Arctic is very low: the area of this vast territory is more than 40 million square kilometers, with a total population of approximately four million people. Approximately half of them live in Russia, with the numbers varying according to how the boundaries of the Arctic are determined (Section 2). The two largest urban centers north of the Arctic Circle are also in Russia: Murmansk (approximately 307,000) and Norilsk (over 170,000); the third, Tromsø (75,600) is in Norway (www.arcticstat.org/).

Population density varies by region. In Greenland as a whole it is 0.13671/km², but nearly a third of the population lives in one city; vast areas are unpopulated. Similarly, in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), some of which is located south of the Arctic by anyone's definition, the population density is 0.31/km²; but here too almost a third of the population is in the capital Yakutsk. However, these cities differ considerably in size and in overall demographics; thus, the daily experience of a person living in one or the other is radically different.

Arctic contact ecologies differ from those in other regions with greater population density, greater mobility, and less harsh climates, where people live and interact differently. Historically, many Arctic indigenous peoples lived nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyles, moving in small groups across fragile lands to feed reindeer herds, to fish, and to hunt. At a local level, there are great differences. The Chukchi people, for example, are divided into coastal Chukchi, who hunt sea mammals and interacted historically in particular with coastal Yupiit, versus the inland Chukchi, who are reindeer herders and hunters. Across the Arctic we find such differences: coastal people hunt sea mammals; inland people herd reindeer and hunt land mammals.

Despite local differences, a common, pan-Arctic experience can be identified. To illustrate the interplay between these factors in greater detail, I provide a closer analysis of the case study of language contact in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) in the Russian Federation, more specifically on the ongoing changes in its capital and most populous city, Yakutsk; I contrast it to the patterns of language contact in Greenland. In Section 2, I provide a broad overview of Arctic languages and contact ecologies, and the international political structure that supports them. Historical and modern stressors in the Arctic as a whole play a role in language shift, in the Arctic as a whole, and with variation in local regions (Section 3).

Section 4 provides a brief overview of Arctic colonization. The first case study, the Sakha Republic, is presented in Section 5 and the second, Greenland, in Section 6. Each of these cases gives the historical background of colonization of each targeted region, arguing that these colonial roots are necessary to understanding the modern contact ecologies. I discuss reversing language shift and the implications of language revitalization and resuscitation for contact linguistics in Section 7, where I conclude with a more general discussion and revisit the predictions of an ecological model.

For classification purposes, we can identify three groups of peoples in the Arctic today: (1) the indigenous peoples, people who have inhabited the Arctic prior to colonization by Europeans; (2) the colonizers and early long-term settlers; and (3) the more recent immigrants and settlers. In order to understand the changing dynamics of contact, it is important to understand the social and political implications of both groups of settlers to the Arctic region, as they have affected the language ecologies in different ways.

2. Defining the Arctic

In a strict sense, the “Arctic” refers to the territory north of the Arctic Circle; it is generally understood to be a larger region, as this strict geographical definition does not encompass the territory that is inhabited by the social actors, who – due to historical and modern circumstances – live an Arctic lifestyle. Both impact and are impacted by the geophysical and geopolitical conditions of the Arctic. Thus, it is common for research in the

natural and social sciences to use a broader understanding of the territory. Here I follow the definition of the Arctic, or the circumpolar North, that is used by the *Arctic Human Development Report* (AHDR; Einarsson et al. 2004) and most international work on human development in the Arctic. The territory is defined as encompassing Alaska, Greenland, the Faroe Islands, Iceland, the northernmost counties of Norway, Sweden, and Finland, and the Canadian North of 60°N along with northern Quebec and Labrador. In Russia the AHDR definition of the Arctic includes the northern parts of the Sakha Republic that are closest to the Arctic Circle, among others (Young & Einarsson 2004: 17–18).

This divides the territory into Arctic versus non-Arctic in ways that affect an understanding of Arctic peoples. Thus, all of Greenland is considered part of the AHDR Arctic and lies north of 60°N. But Oslo, the capital of Norway, is located on that line (officially at 59°N) but is part of “southern” Norway, and Yakutsk, the capital of the Republic of Sakha is north of it (at 62°N). Nuuk, the Greenland capital, is slightly north of Oslo (at 64°N); its southern towns (Nanortalik and Qaqortoq) are to its south. Thus, while the decisions behind the definition of the AHDR for defining the territory of the Arctic are well-reasoned, they are somewhat arbitrary for the peoples who live there, and for their understanding of their own identity. Certainly, people living in Yakutsk see themselves as Arctic, while people in Oslo do not. As demonstrated here, this Arctic identity is critical in understanding the contact ecologies today.

Nonetheless, and despite local differences that vary not just across countries, but also at the micro-level within a single nation, there is a shared experience across the circumpolar Arctic that makes it useful to consider it from the holistic perspective as a united region and a region of contact.

2.1. Arctic Languages: Identities and Shifts

The story of indigenous languages and language contact in the Arctic is largely one of language shift. Of the 50 or so indigenous languages spoken there, all but one are undergoing shift to varying degrees.¹ And even the one Arctic language that enjoys national official status, Kalaallisut (*aka* Greenlandic), shows signs of contact-induced change and possibly early shift. Thus it is useful to first take stock of the overall status of indigenous languages as whole.

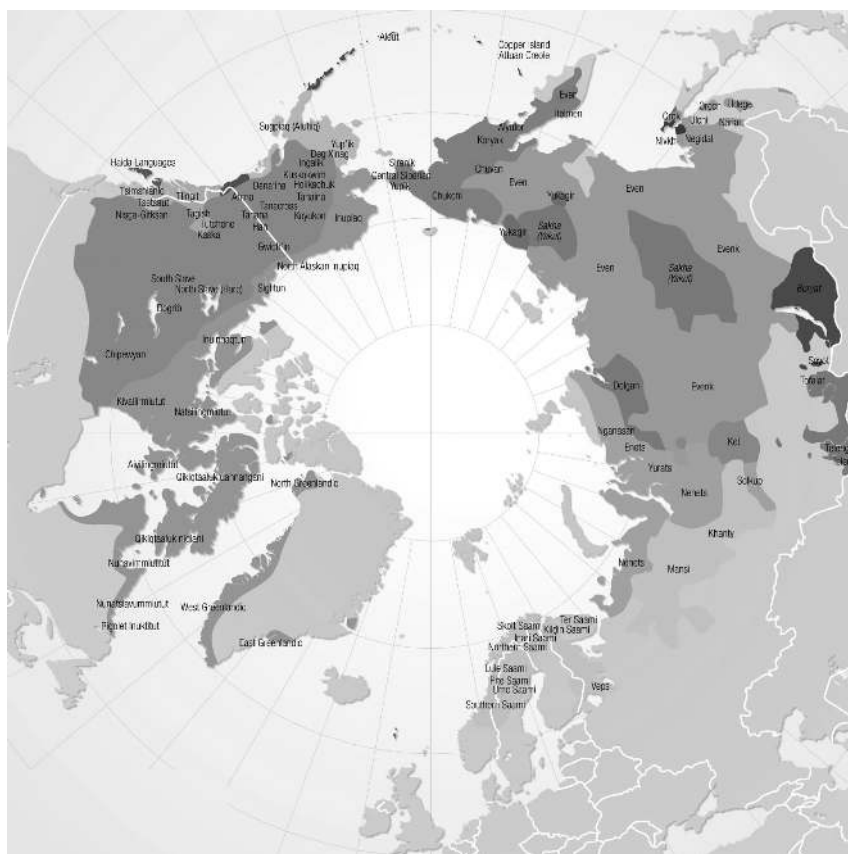
The contact ecologies in the Arctic have changed significantly in the last few decades, with one result being massive language shift, gradual in some cases and rapid in others. Historically, multilingualism with knowledge and use of local languages was the norm, with (presumably) varying levels of proficiency in different local languages. The extreme Arctic climate

¹ Of course, it is speaker populations that shift languages, not the language itself. I use the term language shift here as a shorthand.

resulted in relatively restricted settlement of European colonizers; and knowledge of European languages was limited to groups in cities and to a set number of representatives of local indigenous groups who interfaced between locals and colonizers. Across indigenous populations, local languages were used as *lingua francas*; which local language was used in a given place depended on a combination of demographics and power (social, political, economic).

The last few decades have seen a radical restructuring of these contact ecologies. In rural areas, both people living in villages and even nomadic reindeer herders and hunters are more likely to know a national (and colonial) language than another regional/local language; and in many parts of the Arctic they are more likely to speak a national language than their own ancestral language(s). The ancestral (local, indigenous) language, if spoken, is used primarily in family settings and in traditional activities (such as herding, fishing, and hunting), while the national/colonial language is dominant elsewhere. People who have moved to cities experience even greater changes in the contact settings, as major urban areas in the Arctic are places where, alongside the national language, English is also found. It is even pervasive in some Arctic centers, as are a number of immigrant languages. In these cities, the national language and English have replaced the local languages as *lingua francas*; indeed, in many cases the local language is learned (at best) as an L2, with its primary domain being the school.

There is relatively little linguistic diversity in the Arctic, with only a handful of different language families and one isolate (Nivkh). The modern distribution of languages and speakers is a consequence of historical migrations, displacement, and colonization. This section provides only a broad overview of this linguistic diversity as relevant for the present discussion; a more thorough presentation and discussion is given in Barry et al. (2013). Of particular relevance here is that several Arctic language families are spoken across trans-national borders: *Athabaskan* (in Alaska, the Canadian Arctic, and further south), and specifically the Gwich'in language is spoken in Alaska and Canada; *Inuit-Yupik-Unangan* (in Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and Russia); and the *Sámi languages* (Finland, Norway, Russia, and Sweden) and their homeland territory, Sápmi is likewise divided. A large percentage of Arctic languages are spoken solely within the Russian Federation. The languages spoken in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) are of prime interest to the present study. They are two Tungusic languages (Even and Evenki), Chukchi (Chukotka-Kamchatkan), Tundra Yukaghir and Forest Yukaghir (Uralic), and Dolgan (Turkic). The Sakha language (Turkic) is indigenous from an outside perspective, but the Russian government classifies ethnolinguistic groups in terms of population size, with those less than 50,000 considered indigenous minorities. The Sakha people numbered 478,000 in the last census (2010) and so, by this measure, are not included, but view themselves as indigenous. Nonetheless, they are not part of the Permanent Participants of the Arctic Council (Section 2.3); they cannot be members of RAIPON (the



Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North) because they are not officially indigenous. Map 18.1 provides an overview of Arctic indigenous languages and their geographic distribution.

This brief linguistic snapshot of the Arctic paints a picture of a relatively small number of languages spoken by a relatively small number of people over a vast territory. It is important to keep in mind that the speakers of these indigenous languages are also proficient in the national language of their country; in many cases that national language may be their primary or even sole language. And in many (if not most) Arctic regions they are outnumbered by speakers of majority national languages: Danish, English, Finnish, French (in Canada), Norwegian, Russian, and Swedish. English is pervasive in many parts of the Arctic and is the *lingua franca* in some high contact regions, such as parts of Northern Norway, where there are large numbers of tourists. Moreover, migrations have moved indigenous peoples out of their ancestral territories, and immigrations to the different parts of the Arctic have introduced new languages to Arctic regions. Sometimes these immigrants represent country-internal movement, and sometimes

international. For example, there is currently a considerable Thai population in Greenland, a number of Urdu-speakers in Norway, and a relatively large number of Kyrgyz migrant workers in the Sakha Republic; see Sections 3.1 and 5.3.

Taking a broad view, language shift in the Arctic can be seen as yet another instance of speakers of minority languages giving way to majority languages. And yet there is much to be learned by a close analysis of them, particularly now, while shift is in process. They provide an excellent laboratory for studying the social effects of language contact. First, we have instances of what historically may have been small-scale multilingual communities; there is a pressing need for “more fine-grained accounts of the social settings and linguistic interactions in language contact” of multilingual speakers as agents, and of their role in these communities (Lüpke 2016: 37). There is much to be learned from close analysis of these communities; although (or because) Arctic multilingual communities were not egalitarian in terms of language use, that language use was in fact hierarchical and driven by power, at least for the time depth when we have any records of language use (Section 5). That is to say, the Arctic small-scale multilingual communities contrast with those studied in Africa or Papua New Guinea, where multilingualism is more egalitarian and less driven by social structure.

2.2. Language Contact and Shift in the Arctic

Language contact in the Arctic is different from many other regions of the world due to the low population density and the fact that many of the indigenous peoples, although living in small, scattered communities, were historically nomadic until quite recently, driven by extreme climate conditions to search for food or to move with the seasons to feed their herds. Even today, many still live subsistence or partial subsistence lifestyles, and at least partially nomadic lives, although parts of families (women and children) may be more settled during all but the summer months. The net result is that although people historically lived in small groups, there was often contact due to their migratory patterns, in many parts of the Arctic. The extreme climate conditions have been a major factor in defining Arctic lifestyles.

The Arctic as a whole is sparsely populated, and a significant percentage of the population is indigenous: of the four million inhabitants of the Arctic, approximately 500,000, or 12.5 percent, are indigenous. The impact on population structure varies by country and by region within country. In Alaska, Athabaskan peoples constitute about 2 percent of the total Alaskan population in the Arctic and sub-Arctic regions, but approximately a third of the peoples in the Northwest Territories and the Yukon Territory of Canada. The population of Arctic Athabaskan peoples is significant politically as well, represented in the Permanent Participants of the Arctic Council by the Arctic Athabaskan and the Gwich'in. In Greenland, the overwhelming majority of people are indigenous, some 88 percent or so.

With 12.5 percent of the Arctic inhabited by indigenous peoples, a large portion of Arctic residents are *not* indigenous. There are certainly interesting questions to ask about their experiences of language contact, in particular as English has become a widespread lingua franca throughout the Arctic and is the sole dominant language of the Arctic research community. But none of the majority languages spoken by settlers in the Arctic are by any means endangered. Thus this chapter views contact through the prism of the indigenous peoples living there and focuses on those areas inhabited by indigenous peoples. As noted above, a great number of them live across national boundaries: notably, Inuit live in Alaska, Canada, and Greenland; Sámi in Finland, Norway, Russia, and Sweden; Athabaskans in Alaska and Canada; Aleut in Alaska and Russia; and Yupiit in Alaska, Canada, and Russia. On the one hand, this distribution signals the artificiality of these political boundaries from the indigenous standpoint; on the other, it provides the opportunity to examine the ways in which very similar linguistic systems are developed in varying contact ecologies where the majority languages as well as the political and educational policies differ.

2.3. Political Organization

In response to this lack of a sufficient legal structure for a new Arctic, the Ottawa Declaration of 1996 created the Arctic Council, whose voting members comprise the eight Arctic states (<https://arctic-council.org>). The Council is an intergovernmental entity with advisory, not legislative, capacity, created to foster intergovernmental cooperation in the Arctic. Its primary function is largely to create assessments of social, economic, and environmental issues, and to make recommendations. Six indigenous peoples' organizations have been granted the *Permanent Participants* status in the Council. The Permanent Participants have full consultation rights (but not voting rights). This means that input from indigenous peoples is built into the very framework of the Council. The Permanent Participants are: Aleut International Association; Arctic Athabaskan Council; Gwich'in Council International; Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC); Russian Association of the Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON); and Saami Council. All except RAIPON are international. The names are relatively transparent, and indicate that the groups are defined ethnolinguistically, although it is worth noting that the ICC includes not only Inuit but also Yupiit living in Chukotka, Russia; only RAIPON comprises members from multiple language families. The working language of the Council is English, and the elected representatives of the Permanent Participants by and large have excellent knowledge of English. The exception here is the members of RAIPON, the indigenous group that represents the majority of indigenous peoples in the Russian Federation, who communicate with one another in Russian.

Critically for our purposes here, the Arctic Council has created a forum that brings representatives of indigenous peoples together. This has, in

turn, created a pan-Arctic indigenous identity and raised awareness of indigenous rights on an international level. The Permanent Participants themselves help foster a pan-Arctic indigenous identity, uniting different peoples from different regions. Both the ICC and the Saami Council have public statements that unify people to a single Inuit identity (despite the fact that they embrace many Yupiit who speak Yupik, not an Inuit language) or a single Sámi identity with a single, unified Sámi language, although there are in fact a number of Sámi languages, which are by no means mutually intelligible. Often the motivation appears to be political, as the numbers are significantly higher than when the same people are fractured into smaller language groups. The Inuit Circumpolar Council states that it represents 160,000 Inuit in Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and Chukotka, Russia (January 2019, www.inuitcircumpolar.com/). The Saami Council repeatedly reinforces the unity of the Sámi peoples, regardless of national boundaries, united in language, culture, and territory (Declaration of 1986). The Tråante Declaration of 2017 stresses that the Sámi language “carries and consolidates” their connection to land and people.²

3. Arctic Stressors

There are a number of known stressors for Arctic indigenous peoples that are relevant to understanding the dynamics of language shift. A large number of current stressors on Arctic populations have been identified, including migration, urbanization, and climate change (Carson & Peterson 2016). Urbanization and migration are radically changing the demographics and speech communities, increasing the domains where majority languages are spoken and decreasing the spaces for minority indigenous languages. A major driver in language shift is trauma, and in particular historical trauma caused by a number of assimilationist policies and actions such as the residential school system, forced relocations, punishment for speaking the indigenous language, and cultural shaming. The net result of these stressors has been cultural and linguistic assimilation, with massive language shift. In today's discourse, language and cultural revitalization are seen as part of a healing process, and many Arctic youth are ready to embrace healing and move on. At the same time, many older people still struggle with the traumas of the past.

3.1. Urbanization, Migrations, and Changing Language Ecologies

Urbanization is a known driver of language shift, and it is a widespread phenomenon in the Arctic, occurring in part as the direct result of

² Saami Council Declarations from 2000–17 available at https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5dfb35a6f00d54ab0729b75/t/5e722293aee185235a084d70/1584538266490/TRÅANTE_DECLARATION_english.pdf, accessed January 22, 2022.

colonization. However, in recent years it has also become part of a larger global trend toward urbanization triggered partly by climate change. Warming temperatures have led to melting sea ice and permafrost, opening up access to natural resources and the Northern sea route, and making Arctic development attractive to outsiders, who have resettled permanently or temporarily. Urbanization, which is already taking place at a particularly rapid rate, is fundamentally changing the way of life of the local population (Crate 2006, Cruikshank & Argounova 2000, Dybbroe, Dahl, & Müller-Wille 2010).

Urbanization fosters a shift to urban culture, assimilation to the majority language, and radical changes in the language ecologies, from small-scale face-to-face interactions in one or more indigenous languages between neighbors, family members, and friends to anonymous interactions in public places in a majority language. These changes constitute a major disruption to indigenous lifestyle and language use and, correspondingly, cause a host of social problems for indigenous peoples (Crate et al. 2010, Rasmussen 2011). Indigenous peoples who maintain a traditional lifestyle and are connected to the land show higher language retention rates, both in terms of language transmission as well as the preservation of different linguistic domains (such as those linked to traditional knowledge or cultural practices).

People are moving into Arctic cities and to cities outside the Arctic, with a general population decline in the Arctic since 2000, in the face of global trends in the opposite direction (which show an approximate increase of 13 percent). This movement has created a gender imbalance in many communities: women receive higher education and move to cities or to southern regions (from Greenland to Denmark, or to urban centers in the Sakha Republic in Russia, for example), while men stay in the more rural communities, hunting or herding. The explanation people give is that the traditional lifestyle is more attractive for men than for women, who see greater opportunities and an easier way of life in the city. The disparities in gender vary regionally (Heleniak & Bogoyavlensky 2014: 69), but the general pattern is true of the Arctic, with women not just moving but also driving decisions to relocate the entire family (Vinokurova 2017).

Today, the Arctic population is most highly concentrated in cities, but what this means again varies from place to place. Two-thirds live in settlements of greater than 5000, but they are not evenly distributed throughout the Arctic. Russia has the highest concentration of Arctic residents in large towns or cities, at over 80 percent, and Northern Norway just 40 percent (Heleniak & Bogoyavlensky 2014: 93–5). The largest Arctic cities are also in the Russian Federation, where, for instance, Yakutsk numbers almost 311,760 (Federal State Statistics Service Russia 2021). In contrast, Nuuk, the capital and largest city in Greenland, has a population of only 17,796 (Kleeman 2018: 37). Note that this does, however, represent nearly a third of the total population of Greenland (Section 6). This trend is different from the past, when the majority of indigenous people lived in small, scattered communities. This fact alone

could account for the significant changes in Arctic language ecologies seen today, but those changes are further supported by other stressors, which in turn also promote change in social interactions.

3.2. Forced Assimilation and the Residential School System

In many Arctic regions, intense contact and cultural change came in the twentieth century, in particular after World War II, and is linked to political ideologies of nation states, which promote monolingualism, as well as industrialization. Many Arctic nations introduced policies that explicitly forced linguistic and cultural assimilation and repressed indigenous minorities. There was often strict enforcement of use of the national majority language. One widespread mechanism was the system of boarding or residential schools (*internaty* in Russian), implemented by a large number of the Arctic nations: Canada, Finland, Norway, Sweden, the Soviet Union, and the United States. The schools were established with the goal of “civilizing” and educating indigenous children in the way that the federal government deemed appropriate. The pattern was remarkably similar throughout: children were taken from their homes, often forcibly, and required to live in residential schools, which were generally located far away. Many children visited their families only once a year and often found themselves strangers in their home towns. In many cases, children from different language groups were deliberately put in the same schools so that they did not have a common language (other than the majority). The ideological goals include Christianization (in the US, Canada, and Western Europe) or Soviet indoctrination (in the USSR). The schools were often founded and run by Christian missionaries of various denominations. Cultural and linguistic assimilation was an open goal. Children were taught that their culture and heritage were inferior and were often punished for speaking the indigenous language; and there are many documented cases of other kinds of physical and psychological abuses. Even outside of the residential schools, language oppression and cultural assimilation were widespread. Sámi language oppression in Norway is a case in point. Use of the Sámi languages was forbidden in Norwegian schools from 1848 until 1959; instruction in Sámi began only in the late 1960s (Todal 1998). Only in 1987 did the Sámi Act provide a legal framework to support Sámi language and culture.

These schools have left a long-lasting legacy: they hastened language assimilation and shift, and left deep psychological trauma for the students who went through the system, often with higher rates of mental health issues and substance abuse than the rest of the population (see, e.g., Evans-Campbell et al. 2012). Those who managed to retain knowledge of their ancestral language by the end of the school system often opted to not teach it to their own children so that they would not endure the same suffering. The residential school system was not unique to the Arctic, but is a shared experience of indigenous peoples in many colonized regions. There is a

similar pattern of assimilation policies throughout the Arctic, and the resulting low self-esteem and trauma have fostered language shift.

3.3. Historical Trauma and World War II

Many parts of the Arctic were directly affected by World War II, and the trauma brought by World War II is still felt in many parts of the Arctic today. Sápmi, the Sámi traditional territory, and the people living in it suffered directly. Northern Norway was hit particularly hard: entire villages and towns along the northern coast in Sápmi were burnt and utterly destroyed by the Nazis as part of Hitler's scorched earth policy in 1944, forcing massive and immediate relocation of the people living there. Norway was not alone: the scorched earth tactics were also employed in Northern Finnish Sápmi, and in 1944 an estimated 100,000 people were rapidly evacuated, with over 56,000 relocated to Sweden and a great many deaths also incurred, in particular among children. The evacuations were themselves traumatic: the Sámi reindeer herders were relocated to Swedish- or Finnish-speaking villages where they did not know the language and felt like foreigners, even when they were met with the best of intentions by local populations. Interviews conducted with villagers from Vuotso, Finland, who were displaced during this time, show the long-lasting traumatic effect of these events, which are themselves part of the colonial heritage (Rautio, Kortenieniemi, & Vuopio 2004, Seitsonen & Koskinen-Kovisto 2018).

In the Soviet Union, many indigenous people were conscripted into the army and sent to fight. There are no good statistics on how many native Siberians were sent to fight, but existing data for Northeastern Siberia do show that large percentages of indigenous peoples in certain areas were sent to the front, with lasting devastating effects to the local populations, who lost a large percentage of primarily men, particularly of child-bearing age. Language was a factor, as there was a preference for literate soldiers with a good command of Russian, so that people living in the more southern parts of the Far North were more likely to be conscripted than those living in more northern remote parts, such as Chukotka. This remoteness itself was a factor, as transportation from these far northern/Arctic regions was itself logistically more challenging and expensive. (See Turaev 2015 for a detailed discussion.) Geographic and linguistic isolation served as a protective factor in the war in this case, although monolingualism was a tremendous disadvantage for the evacuated indigenous peoples who found themselves in Swedish refugee camps (or in German prisons) without any working *lingua franca*.

Crucially, war changed the life for Arctic indigenous peoples in irrevocable ways. There were especially massive demographic changes. The small populations of indigenous peoples, which were already fragile, suffered as an additional stressor: low birth rates started during the war and continued afterwards, because of the loss of healthy young men in battle and post-war

hardships. Prior to World War II, the ratio of men to women was 100 to 97; in 1959 adult women outnumbered men, in particular in the age range 34–44, with the ratio of 100 men to 107 women across indigenous peoples in the northeast, and 100 men to 112 women among the Oroch peoples. Turaev (2015: 32) argues that one direct result was an increase in mixed marriages in the Siberian North, which itself facilitated language shift.

3.4. Climate

Climate change is proceeding rapidly in the Arctic due to a polar amplification effect. It has already had a visible and measurable impact, resulting in dramatic changes in human lifestyle and, more broadly, in Arctic ecosystems. The circumpolar Arctic has historically been locked by sea ice for much of the year, but rising temperatures due to climate change have meant a significant loss in both the surface area and depth of sea ice, opening up a Northern sea route. This has in turn created a host of opportunities for development and challenges, which themselves bring significant changes to Arctic language ecologies because they have resulted in significant migration, permanent and temporary, of “outsiders” to Arctic regions. This is a trend that is expected not only to continue but to increase, as global warming opens Arctic waters for year-round transportation and natural resource development, while simultaneously creating challenges (such as coastal erosion) for local populations. Legal governance of the region, which is divided along geopolitical boundaries on land, is deemed by many to be ill-prepared for such international challenges. Unlike Antarctica, where international relations are regulated by the Antarctic Treaty System, the treaty governing the Arctic Ocean and the North Pole is the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), more commonly known to non-specialists as the international law of the sea.

Melting sea ice and permafrost, coastal erosion, and increasing river flows and resultant flooding are only some of the changes due to warming Arctic temperatures. Changes in plant and animal species have affected indigenous residents who live a subsistence or partial subsistence lifestyle. The food supply is directly affected, with high levels of mercury in sea mammals, and indigenous mothers and women of child-bearing age have levels of mercury in their blood that exceed what is considered safe (AMAP 2011). Reindeer herds have been badly affected, with herd sizes dropping by 56 percent over the last two decades (Russell, Gunn, & Kutz 2018). There is an increase in infectious diseases, including cases of anthrax. Waits et al. (2018) provide a good survey of diseases linked to Arctic climate change and claim that the increased number of tourists and immigrants from regions where these diseases are endemic are potential carriers.

Climagrator has been used to refer to migrations that result from climate change (Bronen 2009: 68). Rural communities are particularly vulnerable, as they tend to be in locations that are most directly affected by such

changes. Melting permafrost and rising sea waters have forced relocation of many coastal communities, as exemplified by the coastal erosion in Alaskan communities (Hamilton et al. 2016). Loss of sea ice has made hunting and travel impossible in certain regions at certain times of year. Taken as a whole, climate change has brought about extensive cultural disruption in the Arctic.

4. Colonization of the Arctic Regions

The human colonization of the Arctic has proceeded in waves, with the earliest dating from Paleolithic period. An excellent discussion of the settlement of the entire Arctic can be found in the collection of papers in Kotlyakov et al. (2017). For our purposes here, we focus on the later settlement in the last few centuries, treating the earlier waves as those that brought the ancestors of the modern indigenous peoples, who were followed recently by peoples of European descent and, in the case of Finland, Finno-Ugrics. I focus especially on the Europeans because of their dominance in the region. Even though colonization may have begun centuries ago, from the standpoint of many Arctic indigenous peoples today, it is still a very real and current reality, which has left deep scars and has deeply affected language use and vitality.

A case in point is Greenland: the modern period of colonization dates to 1721, with the arrival of the missionary Hans Egede, who was sent to find and (re)Christianize the lost Norse. As these turned out to be truly lost, he turned his attention to the local Inuit population. It became technically “decolonized” in 1953, although it also became a territory of Denmark. Before then, Denmark had interfered in arguably limited ways in the daily life of Greenlanders. To be sure, Greenlanders were under Danish rule and subject to the laws of Denmark, but only small numbers of Danes actually moved to Greenland. Early Christianization involved the making over of Inuit as priests; the Bible was translated into Kalaallisut, and the first newspapers in Greenland were published in Kalaallisut. It was only with official decolonization in 1953 that full-blown assimilation policies kicked into force, including (critically) the use of Danish in education. This period marks a significant shift in language use; the protests for Greenlandic autonomy that resulted in the establishment of a Home Rule Government in 1979 were driven not only by a desire for political freedom, but by a very genuine concern by Greenlandic political leaders about the state of the language (Section 6).

In other parts of the Arctic, early European colonization was driven, to a large extent, but the fur industry and only subsequently for land. The development of the fur industry was built on, and reinforced, the economic and political power of the outsiders. As early as 1270, the King of Sweden mandated the right to tax Sámi. In North America, fur trade drove much of

the expansion into Arctic regions. The Hudson Bay Company (founded 1670) controlled fur trade in Canada, owned a large amount of land, oversaw and regulated fur trade with First Nations (indigenous) peoples, and served as a local, de facto government in many parts of Northern Canada. Similarly, it was the Tsarist Russian Empire that moved into Alaska, opening fur trade with Tlingit in 1780. Analogous to the Hudson Bay Company, the Russian American Corporation was founded in 1799. Russians brought with them their language and Russian Orthodoxy; and Russian contact with Native Alaskans was widespread, in particular with certain groups (Aleut, Alutiiq, and Athabaskan), as they lived in proximity. Russian men intermarried with Native Alaskan women, and there was general linguistic tolerance, which made the effects of language contact bi-directional during this period. Alaska became US territory only in 1867, when it was purchased by the US Government; US interference at the time was primarily focused on undoing Russian influence. It was in the twentieth century that strong assimilationist policies were put into force in Alaska, as elsewhere in the US. Russians spread into Siberia and the Far East in the sixteenth century, but here too their expansion east was driven by fur trade; they did not extensively relocate until the Soviet period (Section 5.2).

Thus the colonial legacy is that Arctic indigenous peoples were colonized by Europeans speaking English, French, Russian, one of the Scandinavian languages (Danish, Norwegian, Swedish), or Finnish. In the twentieth century, these different powers actively promoted, indeed mandated in many cases, assimilation to their majority cultures and languages. The current trend of language shift across Arctic indigenous communities is characterized, with rare exception, by shift from an indigenous language to a majority, colonizing language.

5. Case Study: Contact in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)

The Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) is located in the far northeastern part of Eurasian Russia, viz., Siberia. *Siberia* is broadly understood to encompass the territory of the modern Russian Federation that is east of the Ural Mountains. This is an enormous territory, encompassing 13.1 million square kilometers (5.06 million square miles), or 77 percent of all of Russia. By way of comparison, the United States is 9.826 million square kilometers (3.8 million square miles). If the territory of Siberia were a separate country, it would be the largest in the world, larger than the US or Canada (the second largest country after Russia today, at 9.984 million square kilometers).³ In Russian discourse, it has traditionally been divided into three regions: *Siberia*, the *North*, and the *Far East*. The total region of

³ Figures from www.worldatlas.com/, accessed January 22, 2022.



Map 18.2: Map of Russian Federation with the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia).
 Compiled by Carmen Casswell, University of Chicago.

Siberia is so vast that it is misleading to treat it as a single, unified region – it is simply too large. The distance from Moscow to Yakutsk is 4883 geographical kilometers (3034 miles), with an estimated driving time of 110 hours today; Anadyr in the very far north is 6197 km (6191 miles) away. By way of comparison, Paris is only 2486 km (1544 miles) from Moscow. Grasping the sheer size of this territory further helps understand the timeline of Russian settlement colonization here.

In what follows I use the term *Siberia* in this broad sense, when discussing overarching historical patterns and focus the analysis more specifically on the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). It is the largest subnational governing body in the world. It has an area of 3,083,523 km² (or 1,190,555 miles²), making it approximately six times the size of France (or almost a third the size of the US) and spans three time zones; see Map 18.2.

The total population of Sakha is 958,528 people (all figures from the 2010 All-Russian census). It also has one of the coldest climates of the inhabited regions of the world, with average low temperatures in January of −35C/ −30F; the coldest recorded temperatures outside of Antarctica are in Sakha, with Omyakon setting a record low in 1933 of −67.7C (−89.9F).⁴ Thus, not surprisingly, the Republic is sparsely populated, with less than one person per square mile (0.80/smile², or 0.31/km²).

⁴ According to the World Meteorological Organization: <https://web.archive.org/web/20100616051245/http://wmo.asu.edu/asia-lowest-temperature>, accessed January 22, 2022.

The Sakha Republic is home to a number of indigenous peoples. It takes its name from the majority group, the Sakha, Turkic speakers whose ethnonym *Sakha* is used for both the people and the language. They are often referred to as the Yakut people (which applies also to their language); this name comes to Russian via contact with Tungusic speakers, who called them *Yeket* (Forsyth 1992: 55). In contrast to much of the Russian Federation, ethnic Russians are not the majority, constituting 36.9 percent of the population. 48.7 percent of the population is ethnic Sakha; the remaining people include immigrants (e.g., Ukrainians, Tatars) and a small but significant number of other indigenous peoples. It is also a multilingual region. Russian is the national language and widely used throughout the Republic, and Sakha the local majority language. Both have legal status: following the *Language Law of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)*, the Sakha language is the official state language (*gosudarstvennii iazyk*) of the Republic (Article 3), and the language of interethnic communication (or *iazyk mezhnatsional'nogo obshcheniia*; Article 5). The law declares Even, Evenki, Yukaghir, Chukchi, and Dolgan official languages in those regions where the peoples live, with equal status as the state languages.

The Sakha language is spoken by an estimated 93 percent of ethnic Sakha but is considered vulnerable and shows signs of shift: bilingualism is widespread, and 89 percent of ethnic Sakha speak Russian (Ferguson 2016). It has largely been replaced by Russian as an L2 for speakers of other languages in the Republic and for some ethnic Sakha. In the last few decades of the Soviet era, use of Sakha was actively repressed and its use declined. There is increased interest in Sakha language vitality, in particular among young people, but many Sakha in Yakutsk are alarmed by the growth of Russian as the dominant lingua franca and the pervasive use of Russian and English on the Internet. Parents worry that even in Sakha-dominant villages, Russian is introduced to children at an early age through Youtube, which they watch in Russian.

The contact ecologies in Sakha have changed from small-scale multilingual communities to areas that are dominated by one or two languages, Russian and Sakha. Russian has replaced Sakha as the lingua franca in the Republic, and even in Sakha-dominant settlements; it enters the home through media on a daily basis.

5.1. Colonization in Tsarist Russia

Russians began appropriating Western Siberian lands as early as 1558, when Tsar Ivan IV issued a land grant to Grigoriy Stroganov for territory in the Ural Mountains, and reached the far eastern coast by 1639. This was a kind of colonization without major settlement: by and large individuals moved, as government representatives, to collect tribute from the local populations. The Russians lived in outposts, not major settlements, and generally met with a single representative of an indigenous group, whose

job was to deliver the fur tribute (*yasak*) and negotiate for his people (Forsyth 1992). Thus language contact between the colonizers and the indigenous peoples was limited to a few individuals, although this early expansion did have a serious impact on the local peoples: it spread disease, and a large percentage of indigenous peoples died from smallpox brought to them by the Russian outsiders, with an estimated loss of 80 percent of the Tungus and Sakha peoples (Richards 2003: 538).

Russian was not a widespread lingua franca even in late Imperial Russia. Instead, local languages were used. In the far northeast, for example, the lingua franca was Chukchi (a Chukotka-Kamchatkan language); the Chukchi people were socially dominant and numerically strong compared to some other groups. When the explorer-ethnographer Waldemar Bogoras reached the far northern parts of the Bering Sea in the early 1900s, he encountered Yupit who did not speak any Russian and communicated with them in Chukchi.

From what we know and can reconstruct of the social systems, there was multilingualism of a certain kind. Most of the population of northeastern Siberia was nomadic, following reindeer herds, and was composed of small groups of several households living in yurts, as functional units that comprised a loose social organization, following a local leader (Kivelson 2007: 34). People were thus mobile, and came into contact with other nomadic groups as they traveled. Thus, it was common for people to speak multiple indigenous languages; people provide reports of their grandparents speaking four or five languages, but it is sometimes unclear what levels of proficiency they had. In my own work, I encounter people who are reasonably conversant in at least two or three indigenous languages (e.g., Chukchi and Even; Yukaghir, Chukchi, and Evenki) and Russian or Sakha. When people were settled by the Soviet government, they were sometimes put into largely ethnic villages such as Iengra, an Evenki village in southern Sakha, known for high maintenance of Evenki even today. There are also multi-ethnic villages, which were historically hotbeds of language contact. A case in point is Andryushkino, in the Kolymskoe region of Northeastern Sakha, founded in 1940 as a kolkoz. Its population as of 2009 totaled 895 people, including 607 indigenous minorities: Yukaghir (223), Even (349), Chukchi (21), Evenki (4), Dolgan (6), and Nenets (4). Ethnic Sakha comprise the majority of the remaining 288, with only 30 Russians (Odé 2013). Its high levels of multilingualism have been replaced by Russian, and the population had declined to 732 in 2017, in keeping with trends to move from remote villages to more centrally located urban areas.

The political upheavals of the early twentieth century and the completion of parts of the Trans-Siberian railway meant an influx of colonial settlers beginning from the 1890s to the early Soviet years. However, they mostly settled west of Lake Baikal, and in the southern regions of Siberia. The relatively harsh climate and geographic distance from a highly centralized society that revolved around Moscow and St. Petersburg as its center meant

that there were relatively few Russian settlers in *eastern* Siberia. By the end of the nineteenth century, approximately 850,000 Russians were living there, as opposed to western parts, closer to Moscow, with over four times as many, or 3,567,000, Russians (Forsyth 1992: 190). The indigenous populations had relatively limited contact with them, and often it was only their representatives who met with them. Thus, the local languages were largely maintained and language shift to Russian was minimal. This situation was largely unchanged in the early twentieth century, when the Bolsheviks took power.

5.2. Soviet Colonization and Industrialization

The situation changed dramatically under Soviet rule, beginning gradually in the early Soviet years and accelerating after World War II and in particular in the Brezhnev era, which moved aggressively toward Russification. One obvious factor was Soviet language policy, which moved from an ideology that ostensibly embraced use of native languages to one that explicitly fostered the development and use of a single Soviet, i.e. Russian, language (Grenoble 2003). Education policies went hand-in-hand with language policies, shifting educational goals from mother-tongue education.

Social factors that have developed independently of explicit language policies have been at least as significant in fostering changes that have resulted in language shift. One core Soviet goal was the rapid industrialization of the Russian Far North. This resulted in resettlements of considerable numbers of Soviet citizens, in particular ethnic Russians, from elsewhere to develop and industrialize the region. This was an artificial kind of development, a top-down decision implemented by central authorities in Moscow, rather than a bottom-up decision of individuals to move in search of new employment. Internal migration was not market-driven but forced for ideological reasons, by a central government that wanted to industrialize the Far North rapidly, without long-term planning.

Just as industrialization triggered large-scale and sudden immigration to the northern parts of Siberia, so too did the Soviet penal system, the GULAG. It was a continuation of Tsarist policies of forced labor camps (or *katorga*), but took place with much greater intensity, on a massive scale: millions of criminals and political prisoners were deported. Moreover, they provided a cheap labor force; and the creation of this labor force was deliberate. Beginning in 1929, an explicit intent of the camps was to place the prison labor force in remote areas of Siberia to extract natural resources, to move defense industries further from the West, and to fortify the far eastern borders against invasion (Hill & Gaddy 2003: 211). Industrial cities like Magadan and Norilsk were built by prison labor. Norilsk is the northernmost city, with more than 100,000 residents, and one of only two major cities built on continuous permafrost (the other being Yakutsk), which speaks to the unnaturalness of this settlement. The Kolyma region

of the far northeastern Siberia is home to one of the camps immortalized by Solzhenitsyn for its cruelty and is also the home territory for a number of indigenous peoples (such as Chukchi and Even), who have stories of encounters with the inmates, including the experience of finding family members descending from the boat of incoming prisoners in Magadan.

The immediate impact on the local language ecologies was two-fold. First, the immigration of industrial workers and prisoners radically changed the demographics, with a significant influx of outsiders, largely ethnic Russians and Ukrainians, but other groups as well. It is common today to come across people who are the descendants of prisoners, or who worked in Soviet prisons, or who work in the modern Russian prisons. Russian quickly became the region's lingua franca, replacing Sakha in this regard.

Second, Soviet policies resulted in the delineation of “boundaries of social divisions of labor” along ethnic lines: urban centers were populated by workers who had immigrated from elsewhere in the USSR, and the local indigenous peoples were largely excluded from these centers and the industrial labor force (Vinokurova 2017: 257). This further separated indigenous from non-indigenous peoples, and relegated the former to the periphery, geographically and socially. This has left a lasting imprint on society in Siberia.

Prior to this social and economic engineering, these areas were sparsely populated by indigenous peoples who had migrated there earlier under pressure from the south. The result of Soviet policies was the rapid construction of large cities in very cold regions with poor transportation and no infrastructure (Hill & Gaddy 2003). The cost of living in the Siberian Arctic is four times higher than the rest of the country, and the far northern cities depend heavily on state subsidies for the basic requirements of living, food, and fuel. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, these subsidies could not be maintained. Furthermore, Soviet control over internal movement ended, and the combined result of open movement and economic collapse meant massive outmigration and population decline. Since the 1990s, a number of changes have reshaped this core/periphery dichotomy. First, there was a massive out-migration of settlers to more European parts of Russia and radical decline in total population of Sakha immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union, dropping from 1,081,408 in 1989 to 949,280 in 2002 (the date of the next census). The total population has continued to rise but has not yet reached the levels of the late Soviet period; the latest available figures put the population of the Republic at 981,871 in 2021 (Federal State Statistics Service Russia 2021). Second, there is increasing internal migration of Sakha and minority indigenous peoples within the Sakha Republic to cities. And finally, there has been and continues to be a significant influx of permanent and seasonal workers from other parts of the Russian Federation and the former USSR (such as Armenia) to Sakha.

5.3. Urbanization and Language Change: Yakutsk

In the years immediately following the collapse of the USSR, there was a significant out migration to western, more European parts of Russia and decline in population of the Sakha Republic, of 12 percent from 1989 to 2002. Since then, however, the population has been increasing, and Yakutsk is the fastest growing Arctic city. Its population increased from 210,642 in 2002 to 330,615 in 2021 (All-Russia Census 2002, Federal State Statistics Service Russia 2021). This increase is largely due to immigration from other parts of the former USSR and a migration from rural areas of Sakha to the city, and not due to an increase in birth rates and/or a lowering of mortality rates.

The bulk of the immigration to Yakutsk is of both permanent and temporary (migrant) laborers, in particular from the Caucasus and Central Asia. Those coming from Central Asia generally speak another Turkic language as their mother tongue, and Russian as L2. There is little to no evidence that these new immigrants learn Sakha; rather, they use Russian as a lingua franca. An informal survey in August 2018 of approximately 20 immigrant shop keepers and produce sellers in Yakutsk confirmed that they use Russian at work and with people.

Critically, in terms of the local language ecologies, these new immigrants live in neighborhoods in Yakutsk and its suburbs, unlike the indigenous peoples, who live scattered throughout the city (and number considerably fewer people). One such neighborhood is Nizhny Bestyakh, located 30 km from Yakutsk across the Lena River, of particular interest as a center of immigration from other regions. It has become a shipping and commerce center because of accessibility: a rail stop is located just 10 km from Nizhny Bestyakh (and is the closest rail station to Yakutsk). City planners in the Sakha Republic anticipate that it will become a suburb town of Yakutsk, with a population of 15,000–20,000. The most recent available data show a mixed population of Sakha and Russians, together with peoples immigrating primarily from Central Asia and the Caucasus: Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, Chechens, Armenians, and others (Sakha Government 2013). Sixty-eight percent of the population are described as Russian speakers (*russkoiazychnoe*). People in Yakutsk describe Nizhny Bestyakh as a Kyrgyz neighborhood, and in fact, Kyrgyz is spoken in the stores and on the street there. It is typical of one of a number immigrant neighborhoods that provide a local domain for the use of the immigrant language. (See Grenoble 2020 for more detailed discussion.)

This is in direct contrast to the spaces afforded minority indigenous languages in the city: there are none. There are no data for the minority indigenous peoples in Yakutsk itself, but within the Sakha Republic, the overall trend is urbanization. The numbers and percentages of indigenous peoples living in cities has consistently risen since the 1989 census was taken, as shown in Table 18.1.

The percentage and numbers of indigenous peoples living in urban centers has risen across all groups since 1989. The numbers are small, particularly as

Table 18.1: *Indigenous population in Sakha, urban vs. rural, 1989–2010*

	1989					2010				
	Urban			Rural		Urban			Rural	
	Total	No.	%	No.	%	Total	No.	%	No.	%
Evenki	14,428	2411	16.7	12,017	83.3	21,008	5486	26.1	15,533	73.9
Even	8668	1909	22.0	6759	78.0	15,071	5077	33.7	9994	66.3
Yukaghir	697	196	28.1	501	71.9	1281	559	43.6	722	56.4
Dolgan	408	35	8.6	373	91.4	1906	260	13.6	1646	86.4

Sources: All-Russia Census 2010, Burtseva et al. 2014

they are spread across different cities and different areas of a single city such as Yakutsk, and they do not form micro-level, local speech communities. Their daily face-to-face interactions with other speakers of their native language are largely limited to family members, and younger generations often do not speak the language. There are few to no city spaces for using an indigenous language. Even indigenous festivals in Yakutsk convene people from different ethnolinguistic backgrounds. Although traditional songs are sung in the native language, the lingua franca is Russian, and communication with the audience and other performance is in Russian, with some symbolic use of greetings. This is a dramatic shift from the historical ecologies of living in tight-knit small communities where the indigenous minority language could be used with multiple interlocutors in multiple domains.

5. Case Study: Contact in Greenland

Greenland provides an interesting contrastive study because of the differences in population demographics and colonization histories. The indigenous Inuit population is the overwhelming majority, and the majority speak one of several Inuit varieties (Dorais 2010: 46–54). Kalaallisut (West Greenlandic) is spoken by the majority and is the basis of the standard and official language of the country.

Despite early colonization in 1721, there was very limited contact with outsiders, and Kalaallisut was the primary language of daily life. The missionaries spoke Kalaallisut, and a large percentage of the clergy were converted from the local population. Education, overseen by the Church, was conducted in Kalaallisut. The Danish government maintained a policy of isolationism to protect its own interests in Greenland; until 1953, no foreign ship could land in Greenland without prior permission from the Danish authorities (Dorais 2010: 329 n. 8). The exception to this was the years 1941–5, when US military presence brought contact with English speakers, and with American culture. In 1941, the Greenland population numbered approximately 19,000 (*Statistics Greenland*), with the overwhelming majority

Table 18.2: *Demographics of Greenland, January 1, 2018*

	Numbers	Percentage
Total population	55,877	
Population in Nuuk	17,796	32
Population in towns	48,492	87
Population in settlements	7131	13
Born in Greenland		89.9
Born outside of Greenland		10.2

Source: Kleeman 2018

being Inuit and less than 500 Danes. The US military presence brought thousands of English speakers. Although there is tension to this day surrounding the US air base in Thule, elders from the northwestern coast have told me stories of American soldiers introducing them to Western products like soap, and showing movies on sheets hung up in ships: “They opened our eyes.” For them, this was a turning point in their history. But the significant and widespread change in language usage came with the political change in 1953, when Greenland was technically decolonized and became a province of the Kingdom of Denmark, opening up the economy and providing an influx of Danes. Education and government administration were conducted in Danish, with the result being rapid language shift (Dorais 2010: 217–19). The institution of Home Rule in 1979 brought about reform in language and education policies, which have been fortified by the Greenland Self Government. But its effects are possibly offset by changes in society. Greenland is rapidly urbanizing: the Government began closing small settlements, which were simply too expensive to maintain, and moving people to larger towns. Today, 87 percent of the population lives in towns, and 32 percent in the capital (Table 18.2).

Danes and Inuit are both citizens of Denmark, and they are combined in the census as citizens of Denmark, so the exact numbers of each in Greenland are elusive, but people born outside of Greenland are more likely not to be Inuit, and likely not to speak Kalaallisut even if they are ethnic Inuit. A large percentage of Danes live in Nuuk, permanently and temporarily. With a small labor force, some government positions are staffed by Danes on two-year rotating posts. They don’t (and probably can’t) learn Kalaallisut for their work, as the time period is too short, and so Danish is often the de facto working language. Higher education is in Danish. It is the primary language of instruction at the University of Greenland, whose curriculum is largely limited to the social sciences and the humanities. For higher education in science, Greenlanders must study in Denmark or abroad.

Population size and power do matter in language contact: larger numbers of speakers can more easily resist assimilation, and the political movements in Greenland since the 1970s have demonstrated the potential for reversing language shift when speakers are able to take some measure of control in

language. Today, however, Kalaallisut is competing not only with Danish, but also with English, which is taught in the primary schools, beginning in the first grade. An influx of outsiders who come due to a variety of interests and pervasive English-language media make it a strong third language and recognized lingua franca. A systematic study of language change in Nuuk as opposed to varieties spoken elsewhere is needed, but casual observation suggests a number of ongoing changes, which may be language-internal, such as an overall shortening of words and less use of polysynthesis. Some, such as increased lexical borrowings and code-mixes, are certainly due to contact.

7. Revitalization as Resilience

Given colonial histories, modern stressors, population sizes, and power dynamics, language loss in the Arctic seems inevitable. Within an ecological model of language contact, language shift is the expected result, given the conditions of encounters in the Arctic, with a slower rate in Greenland due to the population ratio and national status of the language, and a faster rate in Sakha. This can be considered a form of adaptation: the new circumstances support shift to a majority language, and speakers go with the flow. However, this is only part of the story. The indigenous languages do not necessarily disappear without a trace; rather, the speech of such shifters can show substrate effects from the indigenous language(s), and the symbolic use of certain linguistic forms (greetings, ritual language) may be used to index identity where needed or deemed socially valuable. Relatively little work has been done to systematically study the varieties that have emerged from language shift and are used by minority groups today; contrastive linguistic studies are needed, as are contrastive social and ethnographic analyses. One example is the case of Cherokee English versus Lumbee English (Wolfram, Daugherty, & Cullinan 2014). Cherokee English shows contact effects from Southern Appalachian English and some substrate features of Cherokee; its users see it as an endangered heritage language. In contrast, Lumbee English is used by its speakers as part of their ethnolinguistic repertoire, to index an “Indian” identity. The retention (or subsequent retention) of some features speaks to resilience and sustainability, if not of the whole linguistic system, then to some small part of it, and to the importance of that system to index identity.

Also, revitalization efforts indicate a different kind of resilience, and a will to reclaim social practices and identity along with language. A case in point is the Arctic Indigenous Languages Vitality effort, an initiative of the Permanent Participants of the Arctic Council to rebuild, revitalize, and maintain their languages (Grenoble 2013, Grenoble & Olsen 2014). The fact that language vitality emerged as their top priority in facing changes To the Arctic shows the importance of language.

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