

## **Sociolinguistic situation in Votic and its influence on grammatical system and language acquisition**

Fedor Rozhanskiy (Institute of Linguistics of Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow)

Supported by RGNF, grant 03-04-00274a

The paper is dedicated to the sociolinguistic situation in the Votic language (an almost extinct Finno-Ugric language on the territory of the Russian Federation). I am going to analyze how the specific Votic sociolinguistic situation influences the language. The main points concerning the sociolinguistic background are the following:

1) The Votic language has for long been in close contact with both Russian and a number of cognate languages (the Izhorian language, the Ingermanland dialects of Finnish, and Estonian);

2) Presently existing Votic subdialects are spoken in villages with mixed Votic-Izhorian population. At the same time, Votic has always been of less social prestige than Izhorian. It has never been a written language. When in the 1930th development of national languages was encouraged by the government, Izhorian was taught in a local school in the village of Krakolie . Many of Votic children studied there, too. Some Votians call themselves Izhorians, and believe that they speak Izhorian;

3) In 1943, during World War II, the entire population of Votic and Izhorian villages was deported to Finland. In 1944 they were sent back to Russia, but were not allowed to return to their native settlements. People moved to other Russian regions;

4) In about two years the Votic people got the permission to return to their native villages. Unfortunately, by that time the Soviet national minority policy had changed completely. In fact, Votians were not welcome to speak their own language and were constantly subjected to mockery. Very often the elderly Votians were afraid to speak their native language, while children considered it useless. As a result, the Votic language was not inherited by the younger generation. At present, there are not more than 20 native speakers of Votic, their average age being around 75.

This non-trivial situation led to almost complete extinction of the Votic language during the life of one generation. It is of great interest to find out how it is reflected in grammatical and lexical structure of the language. There is a whole series of questions concerning the Votic language that cannot be properly answered if the sociolinguistic situation is not taken into account. To illustrate this statement I can give the following examples:

1) The Votic language has developed a unique mechanism of adapting Russian loan words. The final segment of a loan word undergoes certain changes, which can not be explained phonologically or morphologically. It seems that the language is simply trying to protect itself from being mixed with Russian;

2) Due to the borrowing of Russian and Izhorian grammatical markers the language has developed a specific conditional marker system (which differs from the system presented in the existing descriptions of the language);

3) After the borrowing of Izhorian third plural pronoun the Votic language has equalized the difference in the personal pronoun paradigm. Now all the Votic plural pronouns have Accusative (which does not exist as a separate case for nouns).

Thus, the paper demonstrates how a specific sociolinguistic situation can influence the language structure.