

Friday 13 December 2013, on the occasion of the end of the research project “Tundra Yukaghir”, the **Amsterdam Center for Language and Communication of the University of Amsterdam (ACLIC)** holds a one-day International Conference

## “Voices from the Indigenous Siberia, with an Emphasis on Yukaghir”

### Programme

chair: **Kees Hengeveld**, director of the Tundra Yukaghir Project

- 0915-0945 coffee/tea  
0945 Opening by **Cecilia Odé**  
1000 Keynote lecture by **Bernard Comrie** (MPI Leipzig): *Is Siberia a linguistic area?*  
1100 coffee/tea  
1130 **Tjeerd de Graaf** (Fryske Akademy): *Endangered Languages and Traditional Knowledge in Siberia and the Russian Far East*  
1200 **Dejan Matic** (MPI Nijmegen) and **Irina Nikolaeva** (SOAS, University of London) *Embedded Questions in Yukaghir*  
1230 **Samona Kurilova** (Institute of Humanities, Problems of Minority Peoples of the North, Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Yakutsk) *Pronouns in Kolyma Yukaghir and the Influence of Russian*  
1300-1400 lunch  
1400 **Eugénie Stapert** (Leiden University) on *Dolgan*  
1430 **Mark Schmalz** (Amsterdam University) *Curious Phenomena in Tundra Yukaghir*  
1500 **Cecilia Odé** (Amsterdam University) *Tundra Yukaghir Intonation*  
1530 coffee/tea  
1600 **Tatiana Ignatieva** (Arctic State Institute of Arts and Culture, Yakutsk) and **Cecilia Odé** *Traditional Tundra Yukaghir singing*  
1630 **Audiovisual presentation** *The Tundra Yukaghir People, Their Culture and Their Environment*  
1700 Walk (10 min.) from the VOC-room to the main building of Amsterdam University, Maagdenhuis  
1715-1800 Reception for all participants in the Maagdenhuis and visit to an exhibition of photo's by Cecilia Odé  
1900 Dinner (restaurant t.b.a.) for speakers and invited guests
- Venue: VOC Room, Oost Indisch Huis, Kloveniersburgwal 48, Amsterdam  
Reception: Maagdenhuis, Spui 21, Amsterdam  
Exhibition: Maagdenhuis, Spui 21, Amsterdam



UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

Amsterdam Center for Language and Communication

## Is Siberia a linguistic area?

### **Bernard Comrie**

Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology and  
University of California Santa Barbara  
comrie@eva.mpg.de

"Siberia" is taken here in the usual Western European sense of Russia east of the Urals, while "linguistic area" is taken in the sense of a geographically definable region containing genealogically unrelated languages that share linguistic features (internal homogeneity) that set them apart from neighboring regions (external delimitation) and that are the result of contact. Siberia clearly contains several language families, minimally the (Ural-)Altaic families and the Paleosiberian (Paleoasiatic) families, of which the former may, the latter surely do not form a genealogical unit. There has also been widespread contact among Siberian languages (and their speakers), as evidenced in lexical loans in neighboring genealogically unrelated languages, though primarily at a more local level.

The Altaic families are in many structural respects internally homogeneous, e.g. in being head-final and suffixing and in making use primarily of nonfinite verb forms in order to combine clauses. Of course, depending on one's take on the genealogical unity of the Altaic families, this could be attributable either to common inheritance or to contact going far back into the past. Two methods are used to evaluate how the Paleosiberian families fit into this picture.

First, the World Atlas of Language Structures (2005/2011) is used as a data source. This has the methodological advantage that the features are defined independent of the particular languages under investigation, thus avoiding the dangers of cherry-picking features that advance a particular hypothesis while disregarding those that do not. The general conclusion is that the Paleosiberian languages form a periphery to the core Altaic area, somewhat similar to transitional areas like Sinitic between North Asia and Southeast Asia, though leaving open the extent to which the observed similarities reflect contact versus chance.

Second, a small number of features are cherry-picked, which seem to cross genealogical boundaries and might point to the incipient development of a linguistic area. The most striking is vowel height (or ATR) harmony, with a somewhat less striking role played by phonetically unusual laterals and the distribution of the velar nasal.

In conclusion, Siberia seems not (yet) to be a linguistic area, making it all the more important to study more local contact phenomena, especially in the case of endangered languages.

---

## **Endangered Languages and Traditional Knowledge in Siberia and the Russian Far East**

**Tjeerd de Graaf**

Fryske Akademy, The Netherlands  
tdegraaf@fryske-akademy.nl

The UNESCO Atlas of Endangered Languages considers various stages of endangerment and provides a survey of the available data on these languages in separate areas of the world. This conference contribution illustrates the work on the atlas with the data available for the languages of Siberia.

The atlas distinguishes five degrees of endangerment, varying from safe to extinct. These degrees depend on a number of factors which characterize the vitality of the language, such as the intergenerational language transmission, the number of speakers, etc. The most relevant factors will be considered for the endangered languages in the Eastern part of the Russian Federation in relation to the data of the UNESCO Atlas, the results of the 2010 census and other publications. A comparison with earlier census data shows certain demographic tendencies, which have an important impact on the language situation. To illustrate this a few examples of languages in Siberia will be given.

One of the factors determining the language vitality is the availability of materials for language education and literacy. The Foundation for Siberian Cultures, which was founded in 2010, has the aim to prepare such materials and to preserve in this way the indigenous languages of the Russian Federation and the ecological knowledge expressed in them. The results of modern fieldwork and the reconstructed data from historical documents and sound archives will provide important information for the preparation of language transcriptions, grammars, dictionaries and edited collections of oral and written literature. These can be used to develop teaching methods, in particular for the younger members of certain ethnic groups who do not have sufficient knowledge of their native language. Such possibilities for the teaching, learning and safeguarding of some of the Siberian languages will be demonstrated.

---

## Embedded questions in Tundra Yukaghir

**Dejan Matic & Irina Nikolaeva**

MPI, Nijmegen      SOAS, London  
d.matic@mpi.nl      in3@soas.ac.uk

This paper shows that Tundra Yukaghir displays a lack of (strong) island effects in questioning: questions are possible out of a variety of embedded environments including subject clauses, sentential complements and indirect questions, as well as adjunct and relative clauses. Wh-words remain *in situ* in dependent questions, i.e. in the same position in which a non-question word with the same grammatical function would occur. We argue that this typologically rare feature of Tundra Yukaghir relates to the fact that the whole embedded clause containing a wh-word counts as a target of question: there is morphosyntactic evidence that the question feature percolates to the mother node, i.e. to the head of the island clause, and thus marks the boundaries of the focus domain. We draw comparison with another Siberian language, Tundra Nenets, which shows similar behaviour. We further hypothesize that in both languages the basic syntactic facts are matched by semantics: dependent clauses are not generally used to inquire about the identity of the denotation of the question word they contain, but rather about the identity of the whole island. This has impact on the strategies employed to introduce participants into discourse.

---

## Pronouns in Kolyma Yukaghir and the influence of Russian

**Samona Kurilova**

Institute of Humanities, Problems of Minority Peoples of the North, Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Yakutsk  
samonak@rambler.ru

The pronouns in Yukaghir belong to the lexical parts of speech. They can be divided into major and minor categories. The major categories include personal, demonstrative and interrogative pronouns; the minor categories are generalizing-emphatic, negative, indefinite, possessive and reflexive pronouns. This paper is dedicated to the borrowed elements found among the Forest Yukaghir minor categories, i.e. generalizing-emphatic, negative and indefinite pronouns. These elements are lexical and syntactic words borrowed from Russian and Yakut. In Forest Yukaghir they have become parts of constructions which are imitations of their Russian counterparts. The Forest Yukaghirs have been using them since long ago, though their language has its own means to render the meanings of the Russian and Yakut borrowings. The presence of alien elements in the Yukaghir pronominal class, when there is a possibility of using own lexical and syntactical means, shows how considerable the influence of the languages of neighbouring peoples was on Forest Yukaghir.

---

# Semantic change in Dolgan kinship terms

**Eugénie Stapert**

Leiden University

e.l.stapert@hum.leidenuniv.nl

This paper provides a case study of contact-induced change in Dolgan kinship terminology. It is shown that the semantic structure of Dolgan kinship terms has changed on the model of the neighbouring, but genealogically unrelated language Evenki, suggesting intense contact between the speakers of these two languages.

Besides giving an interpretation of the data in purely linguistic terms, it will be argued that this semantic restructuring may reflect a change in social structure of the Dolgan community, which was brought about by groups of Evenks who shifted to the Dolgan language.

---

## Curious Phenomena in Tundra Yukaghir

**Mark Schmalz**

University of Amsterdam

m.schmalz@uva.nl

The vague and non-committing term ‘curious’ refers here to a range of unrelated grammatical phenomena encountered by the author during the preparation of a descriptive account of Tundra Yukaghir (Schmalz, forthcoming) which subjectively and, potentially, objectively deserve special attention of a linguist. Curious phenomena could be identified on all major levels of the grammar of Tundra Yukaghir: phonology, morphology and syntax. Mostly, they are associated with yet unresolved descriptive problems and therefore were not dealt with systematically or even mentioned in Schmalz (forthcoming). A typical instance of such a phenomenon is an unexpected arrangement of grammatical units, e.g. their aberrant linear order. Thus contradictory observations are made concerning the membership of certain verbal suffixes in a position class within a verbal form. Syntactic constellations with seemingly confused placement of grammatical units can be found too. The following example, whose finite clause does not seem to match its intended meaning, serves to illustrate that.

- (1) *Tude en'ielek pandind'ender ewrejli amaagi ewlikiel'eldaya.*  
*tude en'ie-lek pandin-je-n'-den<sup>1</sup> ewre-jli*  
3SG.POSS mother-INS cook-NMLZ-VBLZ-SIM go-INTR.1PL  
*amaa-gi ewlikie-l'el-daya*  
father-PERT disappear-NVIS[GER]-3SG.DS

‘(I herded for a year with your aunt Dasha.) Her mother cooked for us when her father died.’

“We went having her mother for a cook ...”

Against expectation based on the translation, the instrumental case ending, presumably paralleling here the Uralic essive, is not attached to the stem with the meaning ‘cook’ to produce

---

<sup>1</sup> The verbalizer *-n'* expresses possession.



the meaning 'as a cook', but to that with the meaning 'mother' making the utterance appear to have the meaning 'We went having the cook for a mother .../We had a cook as [our] mother ...'

Abbreviations:

1, 3 – first, third person; DS – different subject; GER – gerund; INS – instrumental; INTR – intransitive; NMLZ – nominalizer; NVIS – non-visual mood; PERT – pertensive; PL – plural; POSS – possessive; SG – singular; SIM – simultaneity converb; VBLZ - verbalizer

Reference

Schmalz, Mark (forthcoming) *Aspects of the Grammar of Tundra Yukaghir*. PhD thesis, Universiteit van Amsterdam.

---

## Intonation in Tundra Yukaghir

**Cecilia Odé**

University of Amsterdam  
c.ode@uva.nl

In order to study differences in types of intonation contour and to describe the form of these types in Tundra Yukaghir, a production and a perception experiment have been carried out. The production experiment consisted of the following fourteen different types of utterance: 1) wh-question (question with question word), 2) yes/no question (question without question word), 3) alternative question (x or y?), 4) enumeration, 5) continuation, 6) neutral statement, 7) statement with emphasis, 8) confirmation, 9) contrast, 10) qualification, 11) calling, 12) calling from a distance, 13) imperative, 14) exclamation.

In individual sessions, five native TY speakers, four female and one male in the age group of 40-70 years, listened to short utterances which I read to them aloud in Russian and which they translated into TY. In this way, for each type five to ten short utterances were digitally recorded and stored in the computer. The recorded utterances were evaluated with native speakers who listened to them to check the naturalness and verify the correctness.

In my presentation I will discuss the first three types, viz. types of question intonation. In order to make sure that the realized utterances were good representatives of the given types, four native speakers, one female and one male who also participated in the production experiment, and two females who did not participate, listened to the utterances and answered all questions, thus confirming the correctness of the type of question. Answers should be, for example, type 1: 'when did he leave?' 'yesterday.'; type 2: 'did he leave?' 'yes.'; type 3: 'did he leave on a reindeer or on a horse?' 'on a horse.'

For the analyses the following method was used. Utterances were segmented from the original recording and for each utterance pitch movements were established by measuring them using *Praat, doing phonetics by computer* version 5.3.56 (2013) ([www.hum.fon.uva.nl/praat](http://www.hum.fon.uva.nl/praat)). The pitch movements were then plotted on a logarithmic scale, enabling to compare realizations of speakers with a different pitch register. The results will be presented in an audiovisual demonstration with a description of types of intonation contour that were found to exist.

---

## Traditional Yukaghir singing

**Tatiana Ignatieva**

Arctic State Institute of Arts and  
Culture, Yakutsk  
tipakeka@mail.ru

**& Cecilia Odé**

University of Amsterdam  
c.ode@uva.nl

### *Tatiana Ignatieva*

The sung improvisations by Forest and Tundra Yukaghirs, together with the different forms of intoning in folktales, dances, shamanic rituals, onomatopoeic imitations of animals and birds, reflect the unique cultural traditions of one of the oldest peoples of Northern Asia. According to the mythological imaginations of the Yukaghirs, singing had magic properties and accompanied a person during his whole life.

Singing (songs, sung improvisations) is called “iakhtel” in Yukaghir. The Forest Yukaghir use for singing the term “iluga” or “ioluga”, which has a secondary meaning and is connected with sung improvisations.

Researchers have observed local peculiarities in the singing of Forest and Tundra Yukaghirs, that are manifested on the level of poetics, terminology, melodics and tonic norms. In the sung melodics of the Forest Yukaghirs (*odul*), that show in many respects assimilation with the Russian culture of singing, dominates a neutral, close to normal singing type of intoning, based on a “diatonic scale” (E.A. Alekseev 1976). In the narrative genres of the folklore dominate variants of speaking and vocalic intoning, for example in the fairy tale about the glutton, the hare. As to the kind of sound production, various types of intoning are also used in the onomatopoeia’s of animals and birds, in shamanic rituals, in round dances and imitating dances of the Forest Yukaghirs.

In contrast to the Forest Yukaghirs, Tundra Yukaghirs have to a large extent managed to preserve their archaic and unique musical folklore. For instance, the personal songs of the Yukaghirs can be seen as an independent genre phenomenon, that reflects the mechanics of an individual and family related identification of Yukaghirs in the form of singing. “Personal” songs could be performed not only by the author-creator, but in some cases they were also reproduced by somebody who remembered them. In such cases the role of the verbal text, in contrast to the timbre of the text, comes in the second place. Among personal songs that are preserved there are praising songs about people or remarkable events, memory songs, songs about animals and many others.

As to types of intoning, the songs of the Tundra Yukaghirs can be distinguished into songs in which recitatives and actual singing switch, and songs without recitatives. The melodic formularity is stronger expressed in the melody of the latter type. Melodies with recitative parts have a more improvisational, spontaneous character both in melodic and in compositional respect. On the whole, in the tonic structure of such melodies, the archaic forms of oligotonics, chasmatonics or a mixture of oligo-chasmatonics, tonic norms are present. Prevalent are melodies of three and four tone steps with a third or fourth interval (ambitus). And often the low basic tone of the melody with recitative parts becomes a zone of ekmelic ornamentations. Melodies of four and five tone steps with an ambitus of fifth-sixth occur rarely, and obviously, have a secondary meaning in the singing traditions of the Tundra Yukaghirs. In our presentation I will give some demonstrations with comments.

### *Cecilia Odé*

In Tundra Yukaghir personal songs, as described above, a special oral narrative technique is used that can best be described as an intermediate stage between speaking and singing. In the literature on Yukaghir singing, this stage is usually described with the term recitative (see

Ignatieva's analysis above). However, it is not so self-evident how this term should be defined. The common definition of a recitative as a rhythmic way of speaking with little or no melody is not appropriate for the intermediate stage meant here, which is neither speaking nor proper singing. From a low tone as reference level, a storyteller realizes intervals that are as a rule never larger than a fourth (five semitones). The intermediate stage can change into singing after which the storyteller may start speaking again. In our presentation I will demonstrate this intermediate stage as compared to normal speaking and classical singing with audiovisual examples which I recorded in 2004 and 2010 from three Tundra Yukaghir women who master the technique.

---

## Audiovisual presentation

If time allows, Cecilia Odé will present a short movie and slideshow on the Tundra Yukaghir people, their culture and their environment.



© Cecilia Odé 2012, *Tundra Yukaghir feeding the fire near Andriushkino*