



POLICIES FOR PRESERVATION OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES: ACTORS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

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Abstract

This paper summarizes the results and conclusions of eight major international conferences on the preservation of linguistic diversity, held in recent decades within the framework of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Information for All Programme, designating the preservation of languages and development of multilingualism in cyberspace as one of its top priorities. The paper also defines key problem areas of the linguistic world view and presents valuable experience of the implementation of linguistic and ethnocultural policies in Russia, one of the most multi-ethnic and multilingual countries of the world. The data analysed show that in order to ensure access to information and knowledge for all, preserve cultural diversity and build inclusive knowledge societies, comprehensive science-based efforts should be taken both at the political and practical levels to preserve not only small indigenous languages, but all languages, including the largest ones. Recommendations are provided on the elaboration and implementation of a multilevel and multifold national policy aimed at preserving indigenous languages; key actors to be involved in such a policy are defined, as well as their areas of responsibility and measures to be taken in the fields of education, science, culture, politics and the media.

Keywords: multilingualism, indigenous languages, language preservation, language policies, Russian Federation.

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Multilingual context: a very brief introduction

The value of languages is inestimable for the people who speak them. We are almost deaf and dumb without a working command of a language spoken around us. Languages act as socialization factors and means of human self-identification. Language is the main vector of communication and transmission of knowledge. Languages are unique tools that enable people to comprehend, analyze and describe the world; they are repositories of information about the ethnos and its history and culture. The significance of languages is also manifested by their use as factors of domination and separation in relation to individuals and nations for the purpose of changing their identity. History and contemporaneity can provide us with many such examples.

Cultural diversity and multilingualism in cyberspace are cornerstones of pluralistic, equitable and inclusive knowledge societies and sustainable development. That is why multilingualism has made itself felt as a burning topic on both the intuitive and rational levels.

Languages have always been a very complicated and sensitive theme. They may even get explosive if treated demagogically, amateurishly and without due tact. We know from history that a mere discussion of this theme resulted more than once in civil convulsions and riots.

Global information society is forming apace. Ever more people become active users of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), particularly the Internet. It has become an inalienable and essential part of the young majority's life due to vast opportunities of communication, access to knowledge and information, self-expression, education, leisure and a greatly extended picture of the world. However, Internet services and information are mainly available in the dominant languages. This is an obstacle which ethnic minorities cannot overcome without a working command of their country's national language or at least one of the world's major languages.

There are about 7000 languages spoken all over the world. 97% languages are used by 3% of the planet population while 97% of the population speaks only 3% of the world's languages. Only a few hundred languages play an important role in education and public sphere. There are only 130 writing systems. Minority languages use writing system of one of the major languages. Latin, Cyrillic, Arabic, for instance, apply for a large number of different languages.

Less than 400 languages (6%) of some 7,000 languages spoken across the world are used in cyberspace and it leads to a wider linguistic and digital divide. Citizens without access to cyberspace and its resources are increasingly marginalized and have only limited access to information and knowledge.

Less than 100, i.e. less than 1.5% of world's languages have been equipped with modern language technologies such as Text understanding, Machine Translation, Question answering, Information querying, Speech Recognition, Speech Synthesis and others, while 98.5% of all

languages are not supported with these breakthrough technologies. This situation also places those languages in danger of further marginalization or even extinction. On the contrary, the above technologies can help to ensure and strengthen the representation and use of even the least spoken languages in cyberspace and, by doing that, they will not only slow down the weakening and extinction of those languages but revive them – not only in the digital world but also in real life. Being an inalienable part of modern science-based developmental policies, digital innovation policies should include comprehensive measures to shape an enabling environment for these technologies to be elaborated and implemented in order to preserve world languages and promote linguistic and cultural diversity. New technologies determine the degree of access and participation in knowledge societies.

Globalization is rapidly diminishing language diversity, though it has always been the factor of intellectual and cultural development of the humankind. Globalization, tremendous mobility and migration, and an excessive pace of urbanization make members of many ethnic minorities regard their native language as lacking prestige. They do not think that its study provides them relevant prospects as the number of its speakers shrinks, and so does the range of topics that can be discussed in this language. Greater attention is paid to studies of the state language and international languages.

No language can develop outside the culture of the ethnos that created and speaks it. At the same time, urbanization and globalization promote the unification of ethnic cultures and oust their majority ever farther into the margin. Knowledge and historical and cultural experience stored by these cultures vanish gradually, and the potential of those cultures and languages is reduced. Cultural and linguistic marginalization is an interrelated and interdependent process. A unique culture vanishes with the death of its language.

These and other factors reduce the number of minority language speakers. Naturally, this further endangers languages with the smallest number of users and the least fit to contemporary life, enhancing their marginalization and even dooming some of them to vanish.

A majority of those problems are topical for almost all countries where two and more languages are used.

What can be done to stop or at least slow down language marginalization? What should be done to enhance the fitness, representation and use of indigenous languages, particularly endangered ones? Who can do it, and whose duty is it?

My further reflections are mostly of a theoretical nature and are based on two pillars:

- Firstly, on the knowledge I have obtained while working with the Intergovernmental Council of the Information for All UNESCO Programme (IFAP). I chaired this Council in 2010-2014 and then moved to my current position of the Deputy Chair; since 2012, I have been chairing the UNESCO/IFAP Working Group on multilingualism which

was established within UNESCO at my suggestion.

- Secondly, on the analysis of Russia's rich and positive language preservation experience which is very valuable minding that Russia is one of the most multiethnic and multilingual countries of the world.

A lot of things done at UNESCO for the purpose of language preservation are done through the UNESCO's Information for All Intergovernmental Programme (IFAP) which is an important UNESCO's subsidiary body particularly in promoting multilingualism. This is a sole intergovernmental programme in the world which has undertaken the study of language preservation and development of linguistic diversity in the cyberspace in close connection with other current problems of the global information society, i.e., accessibility and preservation of digital information, media and information literacy, information for development and information ethics. IFAP encourages UNESCO Member States to take cultural and linguistic diversity into account when formulating and implementing innovation policies and solutions and use appropriate tools to promote linguistic diversity and multilingualism in cyberspace. IFAP also advocates through policy recommendations the entry of new languages into the digital world, the creation and dissemination of content in local languages in cyberspace. IFAP has been promoting the idea of that linguistic diversity in technology and universal multilingual access to information and knowledge in cyberspace are at the core of contemporary debates and can be a determining factor in the development of a knowledge-based society.

Thanks to the UNESCO efforts, more and more people are realizing today the importance of languages and the need in their preservation.

The history of the humankind has witnessed the birth of some languages and the death of others. Nowadays, one can often hear and read that only 50% of living languages will remain by the middle of the 21st century, and about 90% of languages will disappear by the end of that century – being replaced by one of the currently dominant languages. There is a forecast that only 10-15 languages will remain on Earth in two hundred years. What languages will they be? English? Chinese? Any others? Will they be languages in the today's sense? Can they be replaced by a silent and speechless communication – the language of cyborgs that will capture the Earth as a result of the technological development of our body and intellect in the course of the fourth, fifth, sixth, tenth and further industrial revolutions?

The language world view is rather volatile, which is proved by not only minor but also medium and major languages. For instance, 100 years ago, Russian and English were spoken by almost the same number of people. Today, the number of people speaking English is five times higher. As a result of the decay of the global socialist system, the number of Russian-speaking people has reduced by over 50 million in the last 25 years. In the first half of the 20th century, German was the most popular foreign language in Russia; today, it is being studied in just few places.

15-20 years ago, multilingualism was considered at the international level with a focus on one aspect mainly, i.e., on the preservation of minor indigenous languages under the threat of extinction. This is quite fair and justified. These languages must be taken care of no matter how hard and expensive it may be. The extinction of these languages means the extinction of significant and vast knowledge, especially the knowledge of nature, climate, diseases, and the outlook of peoples, for instance, the peoples of the Far North, remote areas of African jungles, or high mountain areas, i.e., the areas whose development today is in the limelight of attention of large business and politicians.

Extraordinary and integrated measures are needed in order to preserve and even develop these languages. All these measures have been outlined and formulated by the leading scientists of the world within the framework of the Information for All UNESCO Programme. First and foremost, there must be a comprehensive and adequate policy at all levels of legislative, executive and judiciary powers actively supported by mass media. This policy must result in the creation of an environment favorable for the establishment of various social institutions which will develop and use different technologically rich approaches, methods and tools to be applied in education, culture and science.

However, if we are bothering today about the destiny of the languages spoken by less than 50,000 people, can it be the case that 100 years later our great grandchildren will defend the languages spoken today by millions, even dozens of millions of people?

I believe that we have to pave a way to the future with a view of protecting and preserving **ALL** languages.

12 major international forums dedicated to the preservation of languages and their development in the cyberspace were held in the past decade. Eight of them were organized under the auspices of the Information for All Programme; six of them were held in Russia. Four forums took place in Yakutsk (2008, 2011, 2014 and 2019), two in Khanty-Mansiysk (2015 and 2017), and another two at the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris (2013 and 2019). Russia was the main sponsor of these events which gathered virtually all leading experts from some 150 countries.

This allowed us to represent a maximally coherent view of multilingualism in the world, analyze the current problems and their solutions, formulate the ideas, and adopt expert documents which may be used as a basis of molding and implementing international and national language policies. We have built a treasury of knowledge and we must make the best use of it.

Six of IFAP forums resulted in adoption of significant international documents which are fundamental for understanding the world's language processes and for drafting adequate international policy aimed at language preservation and promotion.

IFAP has gone a long way in comprehending the problems of multilingualism: from

formulating the significance of the preservation and development tasks for minority languages (autochthonous languages in the first place) up to the profound discussions of language policies used by individual countries and regions for preserving these languages; of the tools used while implementing this task; and of the efforts of the respective agencies to be undertaken to shape a favorable environment for the preservation of autochthonous languages.

At the 2014 Conference, the Yakutsk Declaration on Linguistic and Cultural Diversity in Cyberspace was adopted. Today, this document is considered fundamental by many prominent international experts and is even called “A Concise Bible of Multilingualism”. It contains the description of almost all problems around indigenous languages and paves the way to their solution.

In the past decade, the international discourse on multilingualism extended significantly within the UNESCO Information for All Programme. While initially the question of our concern was only the preservation of endangered languages, more issues are on the agenda now:

- The need in developing linguistic diversity in the cyberspace and representing more languages in it, including minor languages,
- Languages in education, including major African and Asian languages which do not have a formal status, which are scarcely used or not used at all in education and public policy, and which are spoken nevertheless by a vast majority of the population in many African and Asian countries,
- Marginalization of the major European languages – the languages of great literature, culture and science – Spanish, French, Russian, German, Italian, and Portuguese; these languages are being pushed out of education and science, business and tourism, media and politics even in the countries of their origin,
- Official UN languages where English is dominating de-facto and where not a single African language has been represented yet,
- Languages of migrants in large cities which are getting multilingual de-facto the world over,
- The need of a more profound learning of foreign languages within the educational systems,
- Countries with developing economies are talking about cultural imperialism which is being disseminated on the Internet through languages.

The final document of the International Conference “Preservation of Languages and Development of Linguistic Diversity in Cyberspace: Context, Policies, Practices” (1–5 July 2019, Yakutsk, Russian Federation) says the following:

“The position of indigenous languages cannot be considered separately from the context of multilingualism and linguistic diversity in the real world and in cyberspace. Modern reality, sociocultural transformations in specific countries and throughout the world, political, economic

and social processes and trends should not be overlooked.

Language problems in the whole world, especially in really multilingual countries, should not be narrowed down to discussing small indigenous languages. Today, many major and well-equipped languages are also declining in use in various fields – in education, science, business, politics, the media, etc. Even if these languages are spoken by tens of millions of people, the fact that official communications are in a dominant language (such as English) which the majority do not master means that they are marginalized.

Attempts are being made all over the world to make languages visible in all possible ways including in cyberspace. Behind the digital divide, understood as a connection problem, lies a deeper and more meaningful content divide, directly linked to languages. Little or no content produced in many languages compels their speakers to seek content in other languages and eventually abandon their own languages permanently. Care must be taken to establish a multilingual knowledge system, with a view to producing more and more content in all languages and strengthening language communities so that they can produce original content and increasingly translate to and from other languages.

The fewer opportunities to use different languages (minor, unofficial, official, state and foreign) the less the amount of information its speakers can acquire. And the more languages individuals (and the entire language communities) use, including their first or mother tongues, the wider their language repertoire, the more access to information and knowledge and opportunities for self-expression, description, understanding and analysis of reality they get, the stronger and the more extensive is communication. It is important to recognize the multilingual repertoires that people and communities generally use and not just think in terms of individual languages. In this sense, it is necessary to have more multilingualism and not less, and not only in the direction of adding the more spoken languages.

The use of digital technologies can pose threats to many language communities, but we need to consider also that the modern technological environment empowers new uses of less-resourced languages, including oral ones, supporting their preservation and development. Digital technologies, at the same time, facilitate a greater contact of languages and of people inside and between language communities.

Solving the problems of preservation, revival, development and promotion of indigenous languages requires a differentiated approach depending on the function and load of each language and the sociocultural environment in which it exists.

Equipping languages should be focused not on models produced over the past centuries, often in the context of more hierarchical, authoritarian and excluding societies, but on language repertoires, language communities and their demands of different types, demands that organize their linguistic uses. These linguistic uses should point the direction for any development of

resources by and for the users of the languages.”

Multilingualism in Russia: how it is maintained and supported

Let us now proceed to Russia whose experience seems quite instructional in terms of preservation of indigenous cultures and languages and thus can be used as a model.

The population of the Russian Federation is 142 million. Ethnic Russians account for close to 80% (114 million). The other ethnic entities speak 180 languages of the Indo-European, Altai, Ural, North Caucasian, Chukchi-Kamchatka, Yukaghir, Eskimo-Aleutian and Enisei language families. More than a hundred of those languages belong to **indigenous ethnic entities historically formed within the present-day Russia’s borders or living there for centuries.**

Russian is the official language of Russia, used almost everywhere in the country for interethnic contacts. More than 127 million people regard Russian as their native language. A majority of other ethnic communities has its fluent command. Many know Russian better than their own mother tongue and some even better than many ethnic Russians. 13 million of non-Russians regard Russian as their native language.

Russia’s most widespread languages beside Russian are Tatar (5.35 million speakers), Bashkir (1.38 million), Chechen and Chuvash (1.33 million each).

There are another nine languages with the number of speakers varying from 400,000 to a million: Avar (785,000), Kabardian-Circassian (588,000), Dargin (504,000), Osset (494,000.), Udmurt (464,000), Kumyk (458,000), Yakut (456,000), Mari (451,000) and Ingush (405,000).

Another 15 indigenous languages are spoken by 50,000 to 400,000: Lezghin (397,000), Buryat (369,000), Karachai-Balkar (303,000), Tuva (243,000), Komi (217,000), Gypsy (167,000), Kalmyk (154,000), Lak (153,000), Adyghei (129,000), Tabasaran (128,000), Komi-Perm (94,000), Nogai (90,000), Altai (66,000), Karel (53,000) and Khakass (52,000).

All languages spoken in Russia except Russian are minority languages and are affected by marginalization to varying extents because members of ethnic minorities who have no fluent command of Russian cannot aspire to a good career and self-fulfilment in the intellectual sphere, particularly if they want to move to another part of the country.

More than a third of languages spoken in Russia are endangered or extinguishing. The situation is the worst for the languages of ethnic minorities less than 50,000-strong, mainly belonging to the indigenous population of the Far North, Siberia and the Far East:

- 25,000–50,000 speakers – Nentsi (41,302), Evenk (35,527) and Khanty (28,678);
- 10,000–25,000 – Even (19,071), Chukchi (15,767), Shor (13,975), Nanai (12,160) and Mansi (11,432);

- 1,000–10,000 – Koryak (8,743), Vepsian (8,240), Dolgan (7,261), Nivkh (5,162), Todjin-Tuva (4,442), Selkup (4,249), Itelmen (3,180), Kumandin (3,114), Ulchi (2,913), Soyot (2,769), Teleut (2,650), Telengit (2,399), Kamchadal (2,293), Sami (1,991), Eskimo (1,750), Udeghe (1,657), Tubalar (1,565), Yukagir (1,509), Ket (1,494) and Chuvan (1,087);
- below 1,000 – Chelkan (855), Tofalar (837), Nganasan (834), Oroch (686), Chulym (656), Aleut (540), Negidal (567), Orok /Ulta/ (346), Taz (276), Entsi (237) and Kerek (8).

Though Russian authorities of all levels pay special attention to the languages and cultures of those entities, the risk of their extinguishing should not be underestimated.

What is Russia doing at the federal level to support languages?

The Constitution of the Russian Federation declares all languages of Russia its common cultural assets. Almost all languages have writing, which some of them acquired rather recently.

Unlike many other major multilingual countries of the world, Russia offers education – primary at least, television and radio broadcasting, Internet resources, books and the press in almost all of its languages, funded not by private donors but the state budget. Russia is unique in another respect, too: **close on 40 (!) of its indigenous languages have an official status.**

Russia is implementing a state programme for the promotion and development of national literatures of the peoples of Russia. Over the past two years, unique publications have come out - the Anthology of Contemporary Poetry of the Peoples of Russia (in 57 languages) and the Anthology of Children's Literature of the Peoples of Russia (in 55 languages). These collections include, in particular, works by representatives of minority ethnic groups counting for less than 1500 people.

Russia's pivotal duties include the protection, preservation and development of Russian as its state language, which is a tool of interethnic contacts in and outside the country. At the same time, Russia is one of the most enthusiastic proponents of linguistic and cultural diversity. Russia promotes the concept at the international level and makes it a point to implement it conscientiously and comprehensively in domestic policy and everyday practice despite the huge complexity and **high costs** of this work, considering the vast number of other major problems obsessing it.

In the present-day Russian context, promotion of multilingualism is important not only to preserve and develop languages as the basis of the Russian cultural heritage, that is, the heritage of the Russian people and all the other peoples living in Russia. Such promotion also remains topical as always as political, economic, social and other problems are tackled, with the focus on interethnic contacts in a multiethnic community. 2018 saw the creation of the State Foundation for the Promotion of Indigenous Languages of Russia.

Languages can be supported at the federal, regional and municipal levels. The state structure and administrative territorial system can of themselves promote the preservation and development of minority languages or intensify their marginalization. A unitary multiethnic state strengthens and paces up cultural unification and ousts all languages except the official ones into the background. A federation, on the contrary, slows down the extinction of languages and is able to promote their development.

The Russian Federation possesses a sophisticated structure with 85 constituent entities, including 20 republics.

Republics are constituent entities populated by numerically comparable communities of Russians and other ethnic entities, large enough according to the standards of the Russian Federation. Republics are named after such entities. For instance, the Republic of Tatarstan owes its name to Tatars populating the area for a long time; the Republic of Yakutia is named after Yakuts, etc.

The constituent republics of the Russian Federation have their own constitutions and possess greater independence from the federal centre than other members of the Russian Federation. Republics are the sites of the largest-scale and most active efforts to promote cultural and linguistic diversity and enhance the status of titular ethnic groups' languages.

The Constitution of the Russian Federation guarantees all its peoples the preservation of their ethnic language, and prerequisites for its study and development. Though Russian is the official language throughout the country, the constituent republics have the right to establish their own official languages used on a par with Russian in their governing bodies, local self-government and government agencies. Republics can publish federal and republican laws in those languages. They can be used parallel to Russian in elections, referendums and industrial, office and judicial activities, etc.

According to a universal rule, Russian and the language of the titular ethnic group, to which a republic owes its name, are recognized as the state languages of the republic even when this group is an ethnic minority in its republic. Thus, the Bashkir make mere 30% of the four million population of the Republic of Bashkortostan, one of the largest constituent entities of the Russian Federation, while Russians account for 44%.

In some republics, two or more languages spoken there have the official status. Totally 40 indigenous languages have an official status in Russia.

The federal legislation stresses that ignorance of the official languages of the constituent republics is no reason for discrimination in implementing the rights and freedoms of man and citizen.

Thus, the establishment of official languages does not imply oblivion of other languages

of peoples inhabiting Russia. Every ethnic entity has the guaranteed right to preserve its native language and create conditions for its study and development. Republic of Tatarstan is doing much to preserve the culture and language of the local Bashkir, Udmurt and Chuvash. Republic of Chuvashia, reciprocally, of the Tatar and Bashkir, etc.

It is necessary to take into account, however, that even beneficial political, economic, social and other conditions for the protection, preservation and development of a minority (on the national scale) language, and for enhancing its status, do not eliminate the danger of its further marginalization even when it has a considerable, and even large, number of users and there is no direct threat of its extinction.

Russian ethno-linguistic policy is formed and implemented by Russian authorities of two levels – federal and regional. The latter make the greatest contribution as they encounter the problems of preserving multilingualism in their everyday routine, and these problems concern them the closest.

Policies and activities at the regional level in Russia: a case of Yakutia

Let us take the language policy and situation in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) as an example – particularly the Yakut language, with more than 450,000 speakers. The republic is taking special measures to preserve and develop the language. It is an open question whether these measures suffice. Be this as it may, the activities deserve general attention and study.

Yakutia is one of the few places in the world from the point of preserving languages. It does not merely develop the language of its small titular ethnic group (Yakut): this ethnic group itself promotes the languages of the Northern aboriginal minorities.

The Republic of Yakutia has an area of more than 3mln sq km, taking up 20% of the entire Russian territory. It is the largest constituent entity of the Russian Federation and the world's largest administrative territorial entity, crossed by three time zones. It is larger than France, UK, Germany, Spain and Italy taken together.

With a population slightly exceeding a million, Yakutia is one of the most graphic instances of a Russian multiethnic area.

The republic is ruled by the President, the republican Parliament and Government, and municipal bodies. The government includes the Ministry of Culture and Spiritual Development, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Science, the Ministry of Mass Communications and a number of other agencies pertaining to linguistic and cultural development.

The Yakut language is spoken by Yakuts, the ethnic entity that gave the republic its name. Their language belongs to the Turkic group, so the Yakuts are linguistically related to contemporary Turks, Azerbaijanis, Kazakhs, the Kyrgyz, Tatar, Bashkir, Chuvash, Uzbek,

Uygurs and Turkmen. Of all Turkic languages, Yakut preserves the proto-language to the greatest extent.

The Yakut made less than a half of the local population before 2000. Now, they rank first with 46%. The entity has grown by 12% since the 1989 population census. Ethnic Russians come second, with 41%, and the other 126 ethnic groups 13%, all told.

There are other indigenous peoples in Yakutia apart from Yakuts. These are aboriginal Northern minorities – the Evenki, Even, Dolgan, Yukagir and Chukchi. They densely populate 69 settlements, mostly in the Far North, plus 238 registered nomadic clans, 74 of which specialize in reindeer breeding.

93% of the population has a fluent command of Russian. 87% of the Yakut regard their native language as the mother tongue, while only 38% of the Chukchi, 21% of the Even, 20% of the Yukagir and 7% of the Evenki.

A minority language in terms of entire Russia, Yakut is a majority language in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) and has the status of its state language on a par with Russian. Two state languages coexist.

The Even, Evenki, Yukagir, Dolgan and Chukchi have an official status in the republic, however few their speakers might be. Each of these languages has a written form.

Schools use all state and official languages in tuition. The television and radio broadcast in all of them. The same is true of book publishing and the press.

The presidential Council on Language Policy was established in the republic. The government launches diverse targeted programmes of language development reflecting the problems of state and official language functioning. Cultural events are held to promote the intercultural dialogue and improve the linguistic situation. Public holidays are dedicated to indigenous languages, the Russian language and Slav writing. Books, newspapers, magazines and teaching aids come out in Yakut and other indigenous languages.

More than 1,000 book titles were published in the republic in Yakut in 2018, and several in Even, three in Evenki and five in Yukagir.

There are 80 Yakut-language newspapers and 15 magazines. One newspaper comes out in Russian, Yakut and minority languages and one more is published in Evenki.

The Russian language accounts for 60% of republican television broadcasts, Yakut 39% and Northern minority languages 1%. Ever more broadcasts about the culture and history of the peoples of Yakutia come out in Russian.

No language can survive, let alone develop, outside its ethnic culture. So, to preserve a language, it is necessary, first of all, to preserve all that accounts for ethnic identity: culture,

customs, traditions, folklore, ethnic sports, cuisine, economic know-how and environment.

Let us see what is being done to preserve and develop the authentic Yakut culture and language.

The republic has 528 libraries, 79 museums, 12 theatres, 565 cultural centres and 90 children's art schools where music, painting, dancing and other arts are taught, including ethnic arts and crafts. Yakutia holds ethnographic festivals and organizes itinerant art exhibitions and tours of leading Russian and foreign performers in the republic and, reciprocally, of its own performers in other parts of Russia and abroad.

Yakutsk, the capital of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), with a population of 240,000, possesses:

- drama theatres: the National Drama Theatre, which stages classic Russian and foreign plays in the Yakut language and plays by contemporary Yakut authors; the Russian Drama Theatre, the Puppet Theatre and the Youth Theatre, to name but few;
- the National Opera, where operas and ballets to Yakut composers' music are staged alongside world classics;
- a symphony orchestra and the Virtuosi of Yakutia violin ensemble;
- museums: the National Museum, which exhibits items reflecting the history and original culture of Yakuts and other peoples of the republic, and contemporary paintings and sculptures; the open-air Ethnography Museum, the world's only Mammoth Museum, and others;
- the National Library of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) – the largest depository of books and other printed matter in Yakut and indigenous northern languages (library of northern ethnic minorities – <http://nlib.sakha.ru/knigakan/>), and 18 public libraries;
- the National Academy of Music with a boarding school, where children of 7 to 18 years of age spend twelve years, receiving full board and lodging at government expense to study all instruments of the symphony orchestra plus ethnic instruments. The best professors painstakingly select the most gifted children for it in every part of the republic;
- 5 art schools;
- 4 cinema theatres; and
- 2 exhibition halls and art galleries.

Cultural and social life is very intense and vivid in Yakutia.

Study books in all disciplines taught in the schools of the Russian Federation have been translated into Yakut.

According to government statistics, the republic possesses 654 general educational establishments. 415 schools (67% of the total) had Yakut-language tuition.

Languages of the indigenous peoples of the North are taught as special disciplines in 38 schools (some of them nomadic):

Northern languages are studied at the Institute of Humanitarian Studies and Problems of Northern Ethnic Minorities of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Siberian Branch, and the Research Institute of Ethnic Schools.

The republic possesses 6 higher educational establishments.

The Yakut State University, presently with 25,000 students, was transformed into the Northeastern Federal University in 2010. It is among Russia's twelve federal universities and so is entitled to preferential financing.

The university offers higher education in history and philology with Yakut-language tuition (all the other disciplines are taught only in Russian).

The Memory of Yakutia programme, launched in 2000, aims to preserve and popularize the documentary heritage of peoples inhabiting Yakutia, democratize online access to it, and make a government register of unique and exceptionally valuable documents. The programme envisages search, selection and digitization of rare books in the Yakut language, editions on local history, archive documents pertaining to the pivotal aspects of Yakut history and culture, and rare and culturally and historically important sound recordings of Yakut performers.

UNESCO entered the Yakut heroic epic *Olonkho* on its list of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2005. It stimulated the republican government to draw and launch a state targeted programme for 2007 through 2015 to preserve, develop and circulate the epic. The programme aims to preserve *Olonkho* as an outstanding cultural monument for the future generations and promote the rebirth of reciting traditions.

Work on the programme includes the search and collection of epics, promotion of folk narrators, the inclusion of *Olonkho* in curricula, and the establishment of a system to teach children the art of folk recitation. These activities also help to upgrade the personnel in the preservation, study and popularization of traditional culture and language.

The Yakut-language Wikipedia is replenished apace.

In 2019, a 15-volume Explanatory Dictionary of the Yakut language was published as a culmination of over 40 years of efforts by the Institute for Humanities Research and Indigenous Studies of the North, Siberian branch, Russian Academy of Sciences. The publication consists

of about 9500 pages and contains more than 80 thousand words and phraseological units. The dictionary won the *Best Scientific Project – 2019* nomination in the All-Russian competition held by the Russia's Federal Agency on Ethnic Affairs annually to support indigenous languages.

On 27 April 2020, Yandex (the largest Russian ICT company owning, inter alia, the biggest search engine in Russia) added the Yakut language to its Yandex.Translate service. The project was initiated by young enthusiasts from the National Library of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), who collected about 50 thousand parallel texts in Yakut and Russian. Now Yandex.Translate contains 99 languages including five languages of the indigenous peoples of Russia – Tatar, Bashkir, Chuvash, Hill Mari (Gornomariysky variant of the Mari language), and Yakut. By comparison, Google.Translate provides translations into 108 languages.

Though Yakut is the state language it doesn't fully execute its functions. Governmental sessions, academic boards in higher educational establishments, official meetings are not held in Yakut. It is impossible to study in Yakut all high school disciplines. A steady decrease of the number of native literary language users takes place despite all measures. This is partly due to the growing prestige of Russian as a language of inter-ethnic and international communication, vehicle of global information, and the language of university tuition. The same concerns other major languages of the world.

This means that the state or official status of a language cannot automatically solve all the problems of preserving, promoting and developing it. Many researchers point out the inadequate communicative motivation of studying and using minority languages. The reluctance to know and study native culture and language increases with urbanization. This is characteristic of almost all industrial areas and cities. The trend is especially pronounced in Yakutsk, the republic's capital. At the same time, the number of Yakut language students and speakers is growing among ethnic Russians.

Actors and Responsibilities

The described experience has both positive and negative aspects. As we analyze it, we can make an attempt to give an extremely generalized answer to the question of what is to be done to guarantee the comprehensive functioning of a minority language in the shadow of another language, more important in a particular country.

Potential actors/contributors to the promotion and development of a language are numerous and diverse. The leaders of this work are:

- national authorities;
- local authorities;
- the education network;

- research establishments (universities and research institutes);
- memory institutions (libraries, archives, museums);
- artistic establishments (theatres, philharmonic societies, music and folk companies, art galleries, film studios);
- cultural and community centres, principally in remote settlements;
- publishing houses (books and the press);
- bookshops and press stalls;
- mass media;
- ICT industries;
- public organizations and private persons; and
- private businesses.

Let us regard separately each all above-listed principal contributors as their and targets and action lines vary greatly.

National and local authorities

Authorities' policy and activity are of primary importance. An effective policy is a total of dynamic, consistent and interrelated measures to enhance the efficiency of all the other principal contributors whose duties should include (necessarily enshrined in the law) promotion of the preservation, free expression and development of not only linguistic but broader, ethno-cultural and religious identity of ethnic communities, the preservation and development of their cultural values and traditions, of all kinds of folklore, extending the sphere of ethnic language use, and the practical consolidation of the principles of cultural pluralism, bilingualism and multilingualism.

This goal demands the elaboration of special laws and actualizing the acting legislation to create prerequisites for the preservation and equal, profoundly original development of languages existing in a country. Compliance with these laws must be monitored and controlled. Such laws can form the basis for a **broad system** of legal regulation of corporate and private activities, and drawing bylaws. Federal (national) and regional (local) language laws must stipulate that the acquisition of the state status by certain languages must not encroach on the right of all ethnic entities historically inhabiting a particular territory to use their languages.

It is necessary to draw and implement programmes of social, economic and ethno-cultural development of peoples. These programmes should base on measures to preserve and promote minority languages and cultures for mutual intellectual and cultural enrichment. Solicitous

attitude to customs, traditions and other values, and to institutions reflecting ethnic cultural specifics should be the basic demand on such programmes.

Authorities should contribute to systemic language studies and the promotion of multilingualism in education, administration, the law, cultural education, the media and cyberspace. The attainment of those goals can be promoted by:

- the establishment of a regulatory framework for the development of languages at the national level (the national constitution, federal laws, and constituent entities' constitutions, statutes and laws);
- the formation and implementation of cultural and educational strategies, policies and programmes explicitly accentuating the promotion of minority cultures and languages;
- targeted budget and other funding of government programmes of language preservation and development, government and other support of similar nongovernment programmes, and relevant soft taxation;
- the establishment of councils on language policies under the central and/or regional governments, determination of their rights and duties, and vesting relevant rights on them;
- guarantees of social, economic and legal protection of the language by federal legislative, executive and judicial bodies;
- material incentives for experts using both the national and local languages in their work;
- signing (or lobbying the signing) and subsequent ratification of international acts promoting multilingualism;
- promotion of ethnic entities' interest in the development of their language;
- targeted and other regional programmes for the preservation of culture and language;
- help and legal assistance to the development of literature in the language, financial and other support of book publication of various thematic ranges and of the press, particularly oriented on children and the youth;
- formation and implementation of strategies and programmes promoting reading in the native language;
- partnership with ethnic cultural associations outside the administrative territorial entities historically densely populated by the given ethnos;
- support of libraries, museums, archives and other cultural agencies in the preservation and development of minority cultures and languages;

- establishment of ethnic schools to pass ethnic minorities' experience, traditions, culture and ethics from generation to generation;
- promotion of the educational network with an ethno-cultural component and extending it whenever necessary and possible;
- equipping minority language and literature classrooms at general school;
- contracting the governments of other regions densely inhabited by speakers of a particular language, assistance to measures they take to preserve that language, including supplies of literature in it to public and school libraries, promotion of original study books and other educational and teaching method-setting literature, and participation in the graduate and postgraduate training of teachers for ethnic minorities; and
- elaboration of alphabets and writing for nonliterate languages.

As ICT rapidly penetrate all spheres of contemporary life, the support of the presence and development of a language in cyberspace acquires particular importance. The use of ICT brings mutually contradictory results: on the one hand, it levels off cultural and linguistic diversity but, on the other hand, it offers opportunities to preserve and even develop such diversity in cyberspace.

The development of cultural and linguistic diversity in cyberspace is a new sphere of activity. It opens ever more possibilities to preserve languages and cultures, and efficiently and rather rapidly extend the sphere of using languages lacking sufficient communicative and demographic power.

That is why the Declaration of Principles of the World Summit on the Information Society stresses that the policy of building the information society should base on respect for cultural identity and cultural, linguistic and religious diversity, encourage such respect, and promote the dialogue between cultures and civilizations. Special attention in building the inclusive information society should belong to the creation, circulation and preservation of content in diverse languages and the most diverse formats. The development of local content satisfying ethnic or regional demand will promote social and economic development and social participation of all interested parties, including the population of rural, remote and marginal areas.

Authorities can take both general measures in this field to create a friendly enabling environment and special goal-oriented measures:

- initiate, elaborate and implement programmes of IT penetration;
- draw action plans to promote public use of the Internet, including programmes of

information literacy in the dominant and minority languages;

- provide telecommunication networks for remote areas;
- elaborate programmes of information resource development in minority languages;
- promote ICT and information expert training, particularly in local languages;
- promote the creation of local content, its translation and adaptation;
- promote the translation of world literary classics into minority languages, of local authors into other languages, and posting these translations in the Internet;
- establish integrated multilingual information resource networks;
- introduce electronic document and record management in two languages; and
- promote research and development of operation systems, search engines and Internet browsers, online dictionaries and term reference books, and their adaptation to local demands.

Research establishments (universities and research institutes)

Research establishments provide the theoretical basis for government and other social institutions' language promotion efforts and make fundamental and applied research in this sphere. Their duties may comprise:

- studies of ethnic culture, traditions and everyday life;
- studies of languages and their history;
- studies of the current language situation and related problems;
- studies of language-promoting policy and practice in other parts of the country and abroad, and display of pioneer experience;
- elaboration of proposals to adapt pioneer experience;
- elaboration of tools for permanent monitoring of the use of a language by various social groups in the various fields of its use;
- monitoring the state of language use;
- elaboration of tools for permanent monitoring of the work of diverse institutions whose duties include language promotion;
- monitoring of the work of diverse language promotion institutions;
- drawing proposals to the government on language promotion (drafting regulatory acts

and programmes);

- initiation and organization of research and practical conferences on the various aspects of minority languages preservation and development;
- establishment of research, educational and information centres of language and culture for research in minority languages and cultures, and training relevant experts;
- popularizing minority languages and cultures;
- elaboration of national reading promotion strategies, programmes and plans – in particular, in minority languages – in cooperation with libraries, educational establishments, media outlets, and book publishers and traders;
- elaboration of method-setting recommendations on the organization of language promotion for offices and organizations on whom governments vest such duties;
- drawing spelling, explanatory and bilingual dictionaries, including sound-recorded;
- establishment of commissions on terminology and orthography;
- elaboration of text corpuses and phonetic databases;
- linguistic and folklore field studies and expeditions;
- establishment of centralized archives, including electronic archives on minority languages;
- acquisition of the private archives of researchers and community activists (including foreign ones) engaged in minority language support, and passing those archives to state memory institutions for their depositories;
- elaboration of standards of recording and comprehensive representation of texts, and elaboration of alphabets and writing for nonliterate languages, which is of especial importance for nonliterate entities and those that acquired their writing recently (mainly for languages with a small number of users);
- elaboration of a unified literary language when it is absent;
- documenting minority languages;
- research and development of operation systems, search engines and information scanning programmes; and
- elaboration of fonts cooperated with experts of leading companies of relevant specialization.

Education

Primary, secondary and higher educational establishments should cooperate with federal and regional legislative and executive bodies, and research and cultural institutions on issues of supporting and developing minority languages and multilingualism. Their activities include:

- participation in drawing the regional (local) component of government general educational standards;
- training minority language teachers for schools and universities;
- training experts on languages, history and traditional culture of ethnic minorities;
- implementation of postgraduate teacher training programmes;
- elaboration of basic curricula;
- elaboration of academic curricula and learning packages;
- elaboration of language teaching and speech improving methods;
- elaboration of recommendations to implement new language teaching technologies;
- establishment of university classes with tuition in a minority language;
- using a minority language as educational tool in preschool institutions (improvement of native language speech habits) and in secondary and higher school;
- teaching a minority language as credit (basic) course for students to whom it is foreign and who are not its users since birth in all educational establishments in the areas where an ethnic minority makes a considerable part of the population;
- organization of specialist language and literature classes;
- organization of school and university competitions on minority languages and literature;
- organization of conferences and other events on a broad range of linguo-cultural and ethno-cultural problems;
- organization of off-campus language courses, in particular, for compatriots resident in other regions and countries (including off-campus training in universities);
- organization of minority language courses for all comers;
- organization of children's and youth summer camps with minority language speech practice; and
- organization of online conferences in the given language (on diverse aspects and issues of language, literature, culture and philosophy).

Cultural institutions

Of tremendous importance in language support are cultural institutions and activists – not only those directly connected with written culture and preserving it but also drama and music theatres, art schools, folk performing companies, cultural centres in remote settlements, and individual painters, sculptors, architects, composers, writers, journalists, and others.

Memory institutions (libraries, archives and museums)

It is these institutions' duty to preserve, store, popularize and offer for public use all essential testimony of a particular people's history; elaborate as many ways and forms of access to its written and other cultural heritage and products of intellectual and aesthetic creativity as possible, and help to imbue the real and virtual social environment with this heritage.

Libraries and archives must search, acquire, describe, study, popularize and store all printed matter and sound and video recordings coming out in a particular language both in the area densely inhabited by its users and in other areas, including foreign countries (apart from materials in minority languages, all information about them published in other languages is of importance).

The activities of memory institutions include:

- gathering, preservation and extension of comprehensive and thematic collections of all publications and unpublished materials in a minority language;
- creation of full-text databases of periodicals in the given language;
- making an exhaustive bibliography of printed and written sources in the given language;
- making central catalogues of publications in the given language (which is especially important for languages that have recently acquired writing);
- inclusion of bibliographic descriptions of works reflecting the history and culture of an ethnic minority in electronic national central catalogues of all libraries in the given country, and electronic international central catalogues;
- popularizing these works – in particular, by organizing readers' and other conferences, reader clubs, and meetings with writers, critics, publishers, illustrators, etc;
- digitizing documents and museum exhibits reflecting the history and culture of an ethnic entity and dedicated to it, establishment of respective electronic libraries, museums and archives, and granting public access to them;
- establishment of electronic and other museum expositions in the given language or bilingual;

- creation of digital catalogues in museum systems in the given language; and
- archive preparation of digital publications and exhibitions on cultural and linguistic diversity and memorable dates and events.

Together with other cultural, research and educational establishments, libraries, museums and archives can launch and implement diverse projects to create multimedia content on themes pertaining to the founders of ethnic cultures, folklore collectors, writers, artists, composers and performing musicians (on an unlimited thematic range). Texts, photographs, digital copies of paintings and sketches, sound and video recordings can be recorded on discs for broad circulation, and their online versions be posted on the websites of cultural, research and educational institutions, provided compliance with intellectual property rights.

Mass media

The contemporary world has made the mass media one of the most important and most effective means of influence on the public mentality. Their impact almost exceeds that of education. Federal, regional and municipal media outlets can become tools of cultural value exchange and promoting cultural and linguistic diversity in the support of minority languages and upgrading their status.

The contemporary mass media should be oriented on:

- the preservation and development of periodicals in minority languages and pages in such languages in other periodicals;
- organization of television and radio broadcasting in minority languages (preparation and release of programmes in such languages, and cycles of broadcasts on the life of the region where these languages are widely used, and on the original ethnic culture of their speakers);
- organization of Internet broadcasting in minority languages; and
- establishment of information portals.

Book publishing and circulation

When a language has no access to the book industry, its speakers are threatened with exclusion from intellectual community life. Publishers can contribute to the promotion and development of minority languages through:

- issue of research, study and popular science books and fiction and periodicals in a minority language;
- promotion of literary work in the given language, and search for beginner authors

among its speakers;

- stockpiling book collections of educational institutions with study books in this language; and
- assistance to all language speakers in book acquisition with special attention to settlements remote from cultural and industrial centres and speakers resident outside areas historically densely populated by the given ethnic entity.

Public organizations

Their activities to promote languages include:

- establishment of weekend schools, clubs and ethno-cultural associations at ethnic cultural autonomies providing an opportunity of language and literary studies;
- organization of competitions, festivals and other creative events to promote cultural and linguistic traditions;
- participation in the organization of special events, such as annual Language and Culture Days in and outside traditional settlement areas of the given ethnos;
- participation in folk festivals; and
- establishment of contacts with, and support of compatriots resident outside the region or country.

Private initiatives should include:

- establishment and support of Wikipedias in minority languages;
- establishment and support of websites, blogs, twitters and social networks.

ICT industry

Discussions on themes related to information society revolve round linguistic diversity in global information nets and universal access to information in cyberspace. So the ICT industry must have guaranteed participation in the support and enhancement of the status of language. The ICT industry can channel its activities into the following fields:

- elaboration of technical standards with due account for ethnic minorities' demands and promotion of their implementation;
- elaboration of computer fonts for ethnic minorities languages with necessary account for all graphic symbols of their writing without exception;

- participation in the elaboration of international UNICODE standards and implementation of the unified keyboard layout;
- localization of the available software and creation of new free software to support local languages;
- elaboration of computer language models and machine translation systems;
- promotion of the use of a language in e-mail, chats and message handling utilities;
- elaboration of electronic study books and dictionaries;
- establishment of multilingual domains and e-mail addresses;
- elaboration and implementation of software envisaging multilingual Internet domain names and content;
- establishment of retrieval systems localized for a given language;
- establishment of information and other websites and portals in bilingual versions;
- information resource transfer to electronic media; and
- development of the nontextual sphere of Internet (voice over IP, data streaming, video on demand, etc).

All above measures can bring the desired effect only when the entire ethnos – not only its cultural, intellectual and ruling elite – makes major intellectual and emotional efforts, and displays goodwill, desire and interest in the survival and development of its unique culture based on language.

Celebration of the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages opened up new opportunities for us to attract the attention of the public to multilingualism and linguistic diversity. We have to use these opportunities to the full and offer the world such a vision of the value of the languages which could bring this problem to the forefront. We have to offer the world a human and noble language policy which will let people use their potential in the languages of their choice, so that their dignity is not derogated, and languages are not used for the purposes of domination, suppression and separation.

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