

On wearing two hats: The descriptive linguist between language documentation and preservation

The issue of language endangerment and the fact that the majority of the linguistic diversity of our planet will be a thing of the past during the next decades has become common-place among linguists and non-linguists alike. The matter has received, and continues to receive, much attention, and it is probably safe to say that there is little which has not already been said about the decline of our world's linguistic diversity and its detrimental effects - not only - on our possibilities to understand the human language faculty through the observation of as yet unknown or undescribed structures and phenomena.

In this contribution, I intend to address the issue of language obsolescence from the perspective of the language descriptivist by presenting an overview of the known external history of the *Yeniseian* languages, from what once, arguably, used to be a major language family of Northern Eurasia to its present state of imminent disappearance.

This will be followed by some personal thoughts on the growing demand on linguists not only to produce grammars and dictionaries for the scholarly community, but also to play an active role in the preservation of endangered languages or, then, in efforts to revive them, if they are on the brink of losing their community functions.

Keywords: Yeniseian languages, Siberia, Northern Asia, social functions of language, language preservation

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