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The Dialect of Gammalsvenskby: Sociolinguistic Outline

- Location: village of Gammalsvenskby / Старошведское / Зміївка, Kherson region, Ukraine
- The village was founded in 1782 by migrants from the island of *Dagö* (Est. *Hiiumaa*)
- Genetic classification: Estonian Swedish, East Swedish, North Germanic
- The dialect of Gammalsvenskby is the only surviving Scandinavian dialect in the territory of the former USSR
- The present-day state of the dialect was not described until 2004
- The number of speakers:

  1782 — 880 people

  1800 — 150 or 160 people

  1917 — 718

  Now — ca. 10

Present-day linguistic situation in the world

- 96% of the world's population speak 4% of languages; 4% of the world's populations speak 96% of world's languages (D. CRYSTAL. *Language Death*. Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 14)
- Pessimistic scenario: 90% of languages will disappear in 21th century (K. HALE et al. Endangered Languages. In: *Language*, 68 (1), 1992, p. 7)
- Optimistic scenario: 50% of languages will disappear in the 21th century (D. CRYSTAL, Ibid., p. 19)
- Documenting small and endangered languages is the most urgent task of linguistics now: an unexplored language disappears **without trace** and **forever**

International Expert Meeting on UNESCO Programme “Safeguarding of Endangered Languages”

Nine factors in comprehensive sociolinguistic characteristic of a language with a five-grade scale of evaluation:

safe
unsafe
definitely endangered
severely endangered
critically endangered
extinct

Factor 1. Intergenerational Language Transmission

The dialect:

critically endangered

Factor 2.
Absolute Number of Speakers

The dialect:
10 persons,
all women,
3 excellent informants

Factor 3.
Proportion of Speakers within the Total Population

The dialect:
10 vs. 2000

Factor 4.
Shifts in Domains of Language Use

The dialect:
highly limited domain

Factor 5.
Response to New Domains and Media

The dialect:
no response

Factor 6.
Availability of Materials for Language Education and Literacy

The dialect:
potential availability

Factor 7.
Governmental and Institutional Language Attitudes and Policies, Including Official Status and Use

The dialect:
UNNOTICED and IGNORED

Factor 8.

Community Members' Attitudes towards Their Own Language

The dialect:

linguistic suicide and diffidence

Factor 9.
Type and Quality of Documentation

The dialect:

fairly documented

see

http://akropoleis.net/

King and queen of Sweden with speakers of the dialect, 2008
Photo: Tage Brolin