

Itelmen Language Textbooks and Programs

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Кәммә камчатх'ал т'оҗкичән. Итәнмән тскичән.

— I came from Kamchatka. I am Itelmen.

Чакзанла'н лосчиңнән хамух итәнмән қат кизакнән.

— People are saying that Itelmens are already dead.

Қа'м. Муза'н нсунскичән.

— No. We are alive.

Нух клф'аңчк тузанк ттхзускичән. Әңқану тлавалкичән.

— Look, I am standing here among you. I tell you something.

Тху'ән итәнмәнх'ал тласкичән.

— Greetings from the Itelmens I brought with me.

Итх нэсэмқ сунсын. Йәпх уљуқ.

— They are also alive. A little, however.

Самзат'ин районанк камчаткак, КАО.

— In the Tigil Rayon in Kamchatka, in the KAO.

Кәрвәлхәтас чизвин – хә чамзанлал сунсын!

— The language is alive – and the people are alive!

The Itelmens are a northeastern Paleoasiatic people. In the historical and specialized ethnographic literature they are known both as the “Kamchadals” and as the Itelmens, with the term Kamchadals being more widespread. Today they are settled in the Tigil Region of the Kamchatka Oblast, in the villages of Tigil, Sedanka, Khairyuzovo, and Palana, with a large concentration in the village of Kovran. Therefore, it was in Kovran that Itelmen language was first taught in the elementary and nursery schools.

According to the census of 1979 there are 1,002 Itelmens. The Itelmen language is related to the Chukotko-Kamchatka group of Paleoasiatic languages, along with Chukchi, Koryak, Aleut and Kerek. In any discussion of the revival of the Itelmen language, it must be said that for 40–60 years it was not passed on from parents to children.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a very large native ethnic group lived throughout the territory of Kamchatka. According to evidence

presented by various authors, the Itelmens even occupied some of the northern Kurile Islands, where they had contacts with the Ainu, who, through mixed marriages and other means, had an influence on the Itelmens of southern Kamchatka. According to different authors, there were between ten and twenty thousand Itelmens during this period.

Being a settled people, the Itelmens were primarily fishermen, though they also hunted sea mammals as well as fur animals, and collected wild plants. This has been noted by all authors, even S. P. Krasheninnikov (1755).

In 1745 Christianity was brought to Kamchatka by a special spiritual mission. The baptism of the Itelmens signified the withering of the sphere in which Itelmen language was used. Nouns and proper names were eliminated from the language and replaced with Russian ones. Already by the nineteenth century all Itelmens were known by Russian first and last names.

During the Soviet period the pace of assimilation increased. During this time, a large influx of Russians, calls for massive construction projects, and the rapid spread of literacy (in the Russian language) all contributed to changes in the lifestyle and culture of the Itelmens.

In the 1930s many Itelmens received specialized training in Khabarovsk and Leningrad (now St. Petersburg). A Russian-speaking Itelmen intelligentsia was educated. In 1932–33 there was an attempt to create a Latinized Itelmen alphabet, but an early primer (Orlova 1932) soon ceased to be used.

In the early 1970s people began again to study Itelmen language in schools. This began as a small club for the study of the culture and lifestyle of the people. Students from the Kovran school have undertaken with great enthusiasm the collection of cultural objects and their names, as well as customs, signs (*primety*), and tales (*skazki*). The children themselves made objects based on the descriptions provided by elders and informants.

Later, this club was extended to the faculty level, which meant that it was involved in formulating the daily lesson-plans at school. The nature of the work changed: we began to invite grandmothers and grandfathers to the lessons, and to evening presentations. We conducted an interesting evening event in the village House of Culture, which brought a standing-room-only crowd. We put on plays in Itelmen, sang, danced and conversed about religious beliefs. The people were very interested in all of this, and the village's native speakers became agitated. People, they said, need to begin to study Itelmen language.

It was very important to conduct all of these meetings, discussions and remembrances about the life and culture of the Itelmen in the past, and about the inexhaustible vocabulary of the Itelmen language, because at that time there were neither a dictionary nor any books, literary or otherwise, in the Itelmen language.

This preparatory work made it possible to being teaching Itelmen in the elementary school. In order to do this, it was necessary to create a program and textbook of Itelmen language for the first through fourth grade students, and to write a program for lesson plans in the school, in town and for the teacher's preparatory school as well. During this process the general interest in learning Itelmen increased. Then, in 1993 a program was written for "History of the Culture and Customs of the Itelmen". This was designed for the first through fourth grades, 35 hours per year, and could be used by anyone in the village who was interested in this project. In 1996 a program called "Gathering" was written. It was a native production about Itelmen culture designed for the elementary school, but it could also be used also for fifth through ninth grades.

The first year of native language instruction in the lower grades showed that the students were insufficiently prepared to assimilate the program materials, and thus the question of introducing Itelmen language lessons into the nursery school was raised. We then created an Itelmen language program for the nursery school, as a supplement to the standard lessons.

The program's lessons began on the first of September. In each program there is a required vocabulary on a given theme. Based on these lessons, the students receive Itelmen-Russian, Russian-Itelmen dictionaries, which include about 4,000 words (Volodin and Khaloimova 1989).

The first Itelmen primer was published in 1988 (Khaloimova and Volodin 1988), and in 1993 its second edition was issued. In the planning of this primer, textbooks for other Siberian languages were consulted. The aim of the primer is to describe the life of the peoples, and to teach the children what should and should not be done, and how things should be done.

Unlike the very first primer "We Are Going to Learn" (Orlova 1932), referred to above, the new primer includes lessons on the basics of Itelmen grammar. The advantage of "We Are Going to Learn" is that it better reflects the life of the Itelmen people.

The primer has various sections: learning the alphabet, study of grammar, early reading, samples of writing, alphabet blocks and syllables. Those Rus-

sian letters which do not exist in the Itelmen alphabet (*e, b, d, ya, g, zh, yo, shch, yu, ts*, as well as the hard and soft signs) are also acknowledged on sample pages with appropriate material. Borrowed Russian words are written just as in Russian, but used within an Itelmen grammatical context.

The primer includes a lesson on counting from one to ten, even though today native Itelmen speakers count up to three or four and beyond that use Russian numbers. Thus, the section on numbers in the primer is taken from S. P. Krasheninnikov's "Description of Kamchatka" (Krasheninnikov 1755). This material was also used by the authors of "Arithmetic" written in the Itelmen language in 1932–33, when math lessons were conducted in Itelmen. Study with these two books, "We are going to Learn" and "Arithmetic" did not catch on and was soon discontinued.

Thus, the Itelmen language primer using Cyrillic-based alphabet, which was approved on May 6th, 1985 by the Kamchatka Oblast Committee of Representatives and published in 1988, marks the beginning of the emergence of literacy in the Itelmen language among the Itelmen people. Today there is a textbook for language and reading for the second grade, and in St. Petersburg a text is being prepared for the third and fourth grades.

In 1996 the "Historic-ethnographic teaching materials for the Itelmen language" were published under the authorship of K. Khaloimova, M. Dürr, E. Kasten and S. Longinov (Khaloimova et al. 1996). Audio cassettes go with the text. This new book is unique, because anyone who wishes to begin to study the Itelmen language and briefly familiarize themselves with the Itelmen people can use this textbook.

Now a bit about the structure of this textbook. The Preface explains for whom such a textbook might be useful. In the following section is a brief introduction to the phonetics and alphabet of the Itelmen language, as well as an introductory vocabulary. Later there are a few thematical sections referred to as "blocks". In each of these the student learns a specific vocabulary organized around a theme. Also included in each block are some sentence constructions based on the theme and the vocabulary. The illustrations came out very well and are very realistic, and this simply cannot be said about the drawings in the earlier published "Primer" for the second grade.

The words contributed by the Milkovo Region Kamchadals are written in green. There is one point of confusion however: why was the Moroshechnovski dialect included as a separate dialect? It was proven long ago that Moroshechnovski speech is related to the southern dialect, which is preserved

to this day along with the northern dialect.

As for literature written in the Itelmen language, there are two books: “*Detyam Kutkha*” by K. N. Khaloimova (1994a), and “*Elvel*” written by T. E. Gutorova (1995) and translated by K. N. Khaloimova.

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