

Guardian spirit on the balcony  
Rural Mansi speakers in the city

Mansi is an endangered indigenous Siberian language spoken mostly in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug, Russia. Mansi is not an official language, either at the regional or the municipal level. Mansi is traditionally spoken in the Mansi villages between the Ob river and the Ural mountain, but also the ratio of urban Mansi has risen up to 57% since World War II.

The aim of the paper is to analyse and to discuss the role rural Mansi speakers had and have in the changes defining the structure and dynamics of urban Mansi language use. The presentation briefly introduces the situation of Mansi linguistic vitality, the domains of language use, with special attention to the urban and digital use of the Mansi language. The presentation focuses on the rural Mansi speakers' strategies of adaptation and expression of identity in the city, as well as their cooperation with younger native and heritage speakers of Mansi. The presentation also aims to describe the significance of the academic cooperation between rural Mansi speakers living in cities and researchers coming from outside the community. The presentation aims to reflect on the aforementioned aspects by introducing the life story of Mariya Sergeyevna Merova (born 1938), the most prominent member of the Mansi community of Khanty-Mansiysk.

The data used in the presentation were collected during fieldwork in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug (eight times between 2006 and 2019). The information about the consultants' sociolinguistic background and ethnic identity were collected via participant observation and semi-structured interviews, the data on linguistic vitality and organisation of events were collected during participant observation carried out at Ob-Ugric institutions and communities in Khanty-Mansiysk. The patterns of online communication were observed via digital participant observation, carried out since 2012 at various social media platforms.