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The Dialect of Gammalsvenskby: The Problem of Structural Change in an Endangered Language¹

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- Study of endangered languages as one of the most urgent tasks of linguistics today.

“The most important task in linguistics today — indeed, the only really important task — is to get out in the field and describe languages, while this can still be done. Self-admiration in the looking glass of formalist theory can wait; that will always be possible. Linguistic description must be undertaken now.” (R. M. W. DIXON. *The Rise and Fall of Languages*. Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 144.)

96% of the world’s population spoke only 4% of languages at the beginning of the 21th century. Only 4% of people spoke 96% of the world’s languages (D. CRYSTAL. *Language Death*. Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 14).

Pessimistic scenario: 90% of languages will become either extinct or close to extinction during the 21th century (K. HALE et al. *Endangered Languages*. In: *Language*, 68(1), 1992, p. 7).

“Optimistic” forecast: 50% of languages will be extinct during the 21th century (D. CRYSTAL, p. 19).

- The dialect of Gammalsvenskby, the only surviving Nordic dialect in the territory of the former Soviet Union: general information on the project.

- Forms of imperative plural in the speech of semi-speakers as an example of structural change taking place in an endangered language.

Imperative in interviews with fluent speakers:

Conjug.	Infinitive	Imperative	
		Sg.	Pl.
1a	<i>boka</i> ['boka] ‘bake’	<i>boka</i> ['boka]	<i>boka(j)e</i> ['boka(j)ɛ]
1b	<i>arbet</i> ['arβɛt] ‘work’	<i>arbet</i> ['arβɛt]	<i>arbete</i> ['arβɛtɛ]
2	<i>kēp</i> [ke: ¹ p] ‘buy’	<i>kēp</i> [ke: ¹ p]	<i>kēpe</i> ['ke: ¹ pɛ]
3	<i>bind</i> [bin:d] ‘bind’	<i>bind</i> [bin:d]	<i>binde</i> ['bin:dɛ]

Types of imperative plural in interviews with semi-speakers (Emma Utas and Elsa Kozenko):

1) Form coinciding with infinitive + pronoun *ne/nö/ni* ‘you (pl.)’: *boka ne* ‘bake!’, *höld ne* ‘hold!’, *hölp ne* ‘help!’, *jäta ni* ‘eat!’, *skōa ne* ‘look!’, *svora ne* ‘answer!’, *toļa ne* ‘speak!’, etc.

EU: 31 instances, EK: 37 instances

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2) Form in -a (different from the infinitive) + pronoun *ne/nö/ni* ‘you (pl.)’: *ljūa ne änt* ‘don’t lie!’, *söüma ne* ‘sew!’, *gāra ne* ‘do!’, *kēpa ne* ‘buy!’, *fōa nö* ‘get!’, *gōa ne!* ‘go!’, *sūa ne* ‘sleep!’, etc.

EU: 0 instances, EK: 51 instances

3) Periphrastic imperative with the verb *ska*: *ne ska änt sorras* (< Russ.) ‘don’t quarrel!’, *nö ska änt glimma!* ‘don’t forget!’, etc.

EU: 7 instances, EK: 7 instances

4) Traditional forms of imperative pl.: *arbete* ‘work!’, *glimme* ‘forget!’, etc.

EU: 6 instances, EK: 5 instances

5) Forms coinciding with imperative sg.: *bind* ‘bind!’, *mota* ‘feed!’, etc.

EU: 4 instances, EK: 1 instance

6) Forms ending in -a: *sōa* ‘sleep!’, *hänta* ‘bring!’, etc.

EU: 2 instances, EK: 7 instances

7) Disparate forms not belonging to any type: *skārte* ‘cut’ (with the Russian ending of imperative pl.), etc.

EU: 4 instances, EK: 3 instances

• Examples of periphrastic expressions instead of a single verb in interviews with a semi-speaker:

In interviews with fluent speakers	In interviews with a semi-speaker (Emma Utas)
<i>svora</i> ‘to answer’	“give answer”: <i>Kofére gävä-ṭe iṇa svār?</i> EU ‘Why do you give no answer?’
<i>hita</i> ‘to heat’	“make hot”: <i>Ja hār vatn gjūt häitt</i> EU ‘I have made the water hot’
<i>hust</i> ‘to cough’	“have cough”: <i>Ja hār husten, min hāṣ värkär</i> EU ‘I have a cough and a sore throat’
<i>ṭr</i> ‘to whirl about (of snow)’: <i>He ṭḍ_{PRETERITE} all stīgar fast, he snīd o ṭḍ_{PRETERITE}, o har all stīgar fast-ṭḍ_{SUPINE (PERFECT)}</i> LU ‘It has completely covered all paths, it has been snowing and whirling about, and has completely covered all paths’.	“snow falls”: <i>Snjū falldär</i> EU ‘It is snowing’.