Frozen fish and cable internet: the urban Mansi citizens’ attempt to construct modern Mansi identity

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Mansi is a severely endangered Finno-Ugric language, spoken by less than a thousand people in Western-Siberia. More than half of the Mansi are living in towns and cities, thus, besides traditional settlements and lifestyle, Mansi language is now present at urban domains and settings as well. Mansi is not official language at any rate, yet it is used in press and media, has limited role in education, and it is subject of language revitalization.

Present paper aims to describe and analyze the set of markers urban Mansi speakers use for the construction of their identity. This paper focuses on the interplay of urban and rural Mansi identity, also on the place of Mansi identity in the net of urban minority groups’ identity.

The analysis is based on the language use, social practices and social network of approximately 40 Mansi speakers living in the city of Khanty-Mansiysk. Besides using the recent literature on revitalization and urbanization of indigenous arctic languages, present paper is based on own fieldwork experiences, acquired during participating observation and interviews during fieldworks carried out five times between 2006 and 2012.

Keywords: language use, Mansi, endangered language.