

Contact-induced change and language shift: The impact of Russian

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The sociolinguistic landscape of both the Soviet and post-Soviet eras has been largely marked by asymmetrical contact effects, with significant shift to Russian and attrition of the indigenous languages. Focusing on the morphosyntactic changes in these languages, I argue that some are indicative of sustained contact and others of attrition. The former include structural replication, with and without borrowing, with changes (1) in clause combining from parataxis to the extensive use of conjunctions; (2) from the use of nonfinite forms to Indo-European style subordination with subordinating conjunctions and finite verbs; (3) the use of relative clauses built on a Russian model; and (4) fundamental restructuring of the verbal system. Changes typically associated with shift also prevail, including morphological simplification; an influx of prepositions in historically agglutinative (postpositional) languages; and a breakdown in agreement. Examples are taken from a range of genetically and typologically distinct languages with broad geographic distribution.