

## The speakers of minority languages are more multilingual

It is frequently claimed that small language communities acquire languages of larger communities (cf. “Numbers count: a larger culture is likely to be a dominant culture” – Thomason 2001: 66). As Brigitte Pakendorf puts it, “if community A is more numerous than B, then it is more probable that most speakers of B will have direct contact with speakers of A than the other way round” (Pakendorf 2007: 37). We thus expect people in minority language communities to be more multilingual than the speaker of larger languages.

The aim of this paper is, first, to quantitatively test this hypothesis on a vast amount of field data, and, second, to refine the notion of minority language community: what counts as a minority language in a specific setting?

This paper examines multilingualism in a number of villages in highland Daghestan (Russia), the area known for its extreme language density. Starting from the generation born in the 1950s, Russian language often substitutes local languages in the communication among neighboring villages. Hence, the current study is retrospective. We interviewed the villagers about their relatives born at the turn of 19th and 20th centuries, and reconstructed their multilingual repertoire.

For this study, we took the data for people born between 1900 and 1959 in 46 villages. We grouped all villages into three categories according to the number of speakers in the Caucasus:

- BIG (Avar, Azerbaijani, Kumyk, Lak, Tabassaran – 100,000 speakers and more),
- MEDIUM (Aghul, Andi, Akhvakh, Akusha Dargwa, Bezhta, Bagvalal, Gapshima Dargwa, Kadar Dargwa, Karata, Muiti Dargwa, Rutul, Tsudakhar Dargwa, Tsez, Tsakhur – about 10,000-30,000 speakers),
- SMALL (Archi, Mehweb, Tukita, Hinuq – one village languages, 1,000 to 2,000 speakers)

Figure 1 shows the ratio of residents of each village who spoke a certain number of second languages in the given decade. As it follows from Figure 1, people from the villages with BIG languages usually do not speak other languages, or speak just one. The interesting exception is the Avar village Chuni, to be discussed below. People from the villages where SMALL (one-village) languages are spoken usually possess two, three or four L2s (Hinuq being the winner). People from the villages speaking a MEDIUM language vary with respect to the number of languages in their repertoire. Some of them are more similar to large languages, some come close to one-village languages.

In order to test the tendency statistically, we estimated multilingualism as a median value of the number of second languages spoken in village. Since observations from the same village and decade are not independent, we used mixed effects model to estimate the median number of second languages with the village and decade as random effects. We obtained the following results:

	Estimate	Std. error	df	t value	Pr(> t )
(Intercept)	0.4948268	0.1214293	45.88887	4.075020	0.0001805348348
statusmedium	0.7360862	0.1577304	43.41026	4.666735	0.0000294198672
statussmall	1.7187522	0.2785235	42.73964	6.170942	0.0000002110047

As we can see from the model, median number of second languages in villages where BIG language is spoken is 0,49. The predicted value for median number of villages where native language is MEDIUM is 1,23 (intercept + statusmedium). The greatest value we obtained from

the model are SMALL languages — their median knowledge of language is 2,21 (intercept + status small).

We draw a conclusion that the size of language community is indeed a significant predictor of the number of languages in the local repertoire. There are however several cases which need special explanation, one of them being Chuni. Chuni is an Avar enclave in a Dargwa speaking region. Their closest neighbors are speakers of two different dialects of Dargwa, Akusha (Tsukhta) and Tsudakhar (Upper Ubekimakhi). There are no other speakers of Avar at the distance of everyday reach. Dargwa dialects were spoken at the local markets. Although Avar is a major (in fact, the largest) language of Daghestan, Chuni residents behave as speakers of a minority language and speak languages of their neighbors.

## References

Pakendorf, Brigitte. (2007). Contact in the Prehistory of the Sakha (Yakut): Linguistic and Genetic Perspectives. LOT Dissertation series 170. Utrecht: LOT.

Thomason, Sarah G. (2001). Language contact: an introduction. Washington: Georgetown University Press.98.

Figure 1.

