

Disharmony and Decay: Itelmen Vowel Harmony in the Soviet Period

Itelmen (Chukotko-Kamchatkan) appears to have had a robust, bi-directional, dominant-recessive vowel harmony pattern as recently as the early 1900s. Within a few generations, the harmony system all but disappeared, contracting in its morphological domain, and probably now best described as a morphologically-governed ablaut system (cf. Georg & Volodin 1999). In this talk, I present evidence for the nature of the system at the beginning of the 20th century, and trace its subsequent decay. In doing so, I offer some tentative speculations on the various factors that contributed to the morphologization of this previously phonological process, offering a case study to be compared with the fates of other harmony systems in contact/attrition situations.