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The exchange of words, things and persons among Nenets reindeer herders

The paper is an attempt to conceptualise how nomadic Nenets reindeer herders use language in various social situations. The Yamb-To and Ural Nenets in the northeastern geographical Europe (where I have done my fieldwork) treat words with a particular attention because of their potential agency and social consequences. The concept of words (*vada*) as being capable of (semi)autonomous actions is an underlying idea in various communicative situations. In the paper, I ask questions about Nenets language ideology and practices such as what is the role of language-based interaction in herders' everyday life? How is exchanging words comparable to other forms of exchange such as giving gifts to fellow humans or making sacrifices to gods? How do verbal actions differ from nonverbal deeds in situations like marriage negotiations, quarrelling or gossiping? What is at stake when herders communicate with the outsiders who try to make "taciturn" locals to talk? I intend to analyse these and some other issues that shape the Nenets nomads' way of life in the context in which it is growingly more challenged by the sedentary world.