



# Itelmen

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Originally Itelmen was spoken throughout Kamchatka, and possibly also in the northern [Kuril Islands](#). [Vladimir Atlasov](#), who annexed Kamchatka and established military bases in the region, estimated in 1697 that there were about 20,000 ethnic Itelmens. The explorer [Stepan Krasheninnikov](#), who gave the first detailed description of the Itelmen language and culture, identified the three main dialects, but explained that all Itelmens could understand each other.

From the time of Atlasov, Russian fur traders began to settle in the region. There were frequent clashes between Cossacks and Itelmens, who rebelled against Russian domination. Many Itelmen were forcibly converted to [Christianity](#), and by the early nineteenth century all Itelmen were forced to adopt Russian names. Inter-marriage with Russian settlers led to the development of a creole known as Kamchadal, traces of which remain in the Russian dialect now spoken in Kamchatka.

During the [Soviet](#) era the process of assimilation intensified, as Itelmen communities were moved by force and children were sent to boarding schools, where they were required to speak Russian. By the end of the 1930s Russian was the medium of instruction in all schools, and children grew up speaking Russian as their main language.

However it was also during this period that Itelmen was written down for the first time. In 1930 a Latin-based alphabet was designed for all the native languages of northern Siberia, and in 1932 a 27-letter Itelmen alphabet was created. A few textbooks were written in this alphabet during the 1930s, but it was quickly abandoned. More recently a Cyrillic-based alphabet, designed in 1986 and consisting of 32 letters, has been used.

