

# Modern problems of Evenk language functioning and its development prospects

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**Abstract.** The article is dedicated to the modern problems of Evenk language functioning and its development prospects. The preservation and development of the language remain an urgent sociolinguistic and sociocultural problem to this day. The research conducted in Yakutia shows that the functioning of Evenk language is reduced to a minimum. The linguistic situation with the native language is assessed as definitely critical and can be one of the indicators of socio-economic ill-being of not only Evenks, but also other indigenous peoples. The main problems of linguistic life in the republic include the reduction of Evenk language functions and inadequate formation of a positive motivation for learning the native language. In the society, there is a complex system of objective and subjective factors that do not contribute to intensive development of positive processes in the preservation and development of Evenk language. In general, subjective factors include poor organization of the educational process in educational institutions, ineffectiveness of training sessions, insufficient attention to the development of speech culture and enrichment of the native language's vocabulary, low level of educational and methodological support of education and upbringing. The social environment for Evenk language functioning is continuing to narrow, which makes an objective factor.

## 1 Introduction

The article discusses modern problems of functioning and prospects for the functioning of the Evenk language. Referring to specific linguistic situations in various places of Evenks' compact residence in the republic – Iengravillage of Neryungri District, Khatystyr village of Aldan District, Tyanyavillage of Olyokma District – allows one to obtain reliable assessments of the conditions and prospects for the development and revival of the natural intergenerational transmission of the native language. This takes into account 1) status, demographic and communicative characteristics; 2) assessing their vitality in the existing sociolinguistic classifications; 3) the conditions for turning the language shift [1] and the prospects for studying the language development.

Modern language policy strategies aimed at strengthening the prospects for the vitality of indigenous languages stem from the relevant articles of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) [2]. The main aspects include the differentiation of the goals of reviving or preserving the status of the minority native languages - functionally the first language or functionally the second language; the importance of teaching in native indigenous languages using modern

teaching technologies. An equally important factor is the potential for the indigenous peoples' activity.

## 2 Results and discussion

According to the 2010 census, 21,008 Evenks live in the Sakha Republic (Yakutia); the share of people who indicated their native language corresponding to their ethnicity remains low. As compared with the previous census, the share has been steadily decreasing [3].

The functioning of the Evenk language is reduced to a minimum, the linguistic situation with the native language is assessed as definitely critical and can serve as one of the indicators of socio-economic ill-being of not only Evenks, but also other indigenous peoples of the North. According to the Law of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) "On the Status of the Languages of the Indigenous Small-numbered Peoples of the North of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia)", the languages of the peoples of the North, including Evenk, are official at the places of these peoples' compact residence.

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**Table 1.** Number of indigenous peoples of the North of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) according to the census of 1989, 2002 and 2010, thousand people

Representatives of the indigenous peoples of the North of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia)	1989	2002	2010	Change in the number by 2010 as compared with 1989, %
Evenk	14,4	18,2	21,0	145,8
Even	8,7	11,7	15,0	172,4
Yukaghir	0,8	1,1	1,3	162,5
Chukchi	0,5	0,6	0,7	140,0
Dolgan	0,4	1,3	1,9	475,0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>24,8</b>	<b>32,9</b>	<b>39,9</b>	<b>160,9</b>

By analogy with the international practice, the official status of a language presupposes the use of the language in the public life of the society. Unfortunately, this is not the case. The Evenk language is not used: on the official signs, in the street names, attributes and information, there are only a few examples; in none of the settlements the Evenk language is used in the work of the authorities and paperwork, etc. Thus, in fact, the Evenk language does not fully fulfill the role of the official language.

Changes in the modern linguistic situation among the indigenous small-numbered peoples of the North, including Evenks, in the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) deserve special attention [4].

In the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), the reports of the government, public organizations, educational and scientific institutions dealing with this issue contain a lot of different information on the measures taken to improve this situation.

The republic has adopted its own language policies. These are the Laws "On the legal status of the indigenous small-numbered peoples of the North", "On the languages in the Sakha Republic (Yakutia)" (October 16, 1992), "On the status of the languages of the indigenous small-numbered peoples of the North of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia)" (1992), "On education" and other regulatory documents of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation and the Sakha Republic (Yakutia).

To implement the Law "On the languages in the Sakha Republic (Yakutia)", the National Program on the revival, preservation and development of the languages of the indigenous peoples of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) was developed and adopted for implementation in 1993. The main developers of this program were the Institute of Humanities of the Academy of Sciences of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) (Part 1) and the Institute of Indigenous Peoples of the North SD RAS (Part 2) that existed in those years. The goals of the program are to create favorable conditions for the development and support of the state and official languages of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) [5].

Educational sovereignty has become one of the ways to manifest the republic's state sovereignty. Experts recognize that a systematic impact on the Evenks' linguistic situation, as well as purposeful activity of teaching the language in the educational institutions can stop the assimilation processes resulting in the loss of the language. Unfortunately, over the past 4 years, there has been a negative trend of reducing the number of schools where native languages are taught. To overcome this negative trend, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) needs to tighten control and responsibility of the district education authorities for the indices; in particular, it should include these indices in the performance indicators of the senior education executives.

At present, the Native Language subject is taught in Evenk schools; however, the scope of Evenk language is shrinking, and the introduction of new subjects cannot really change this situation. The fact is that children barely hear Evenk speech at home and outside school in general, i.e., there is no language environment; they do not really need to use it anywhere [5].

Staffing the preservation of languages remains a topical issue.

Sociolinguistic approach considers the literary language as one of the forms of the language existence in general. "According to the experts in Tungus languages, modern Evenk language still does not have an established literary and written form" [6].

In this regard, the issues of identifying the prospects for further functioning of Evenk language arise. The results of surveying the degree of preservation and the prospects for the development of Evenk language among the Evenks in the areas of dispersed residence of the Evenks via surveys and interviews made it possible to reveal the ratio of those who have good knowledge of Evenk language, poor knowledge of Evenk language or no knowledge of Evenk language at all. Let us give an example of the linguistic situation of Evenks living in the village of Khatystyr of Aldan District. The analysis of the statistical data presented by a student of the Northern Philology Department of Ammosov NEFU is

presented as follows: total 59 people were interviewed, 35 of them being men and 24 women. Of these, 12 people have higher education, 25 secondary vocational education, 12 secondary education, 12 schoolchildren, and 10 students. 43 people recognized Yakut language as the most functional, 23 people recognized the need for Evenk language, 16 people considered Evenk language unnecessary. 59 respondents see the importance of Evenk language in preserving the traditional culture. Only 1 person of all the respondents spoke Evenk. As you can see, in the village of Khatystyr, mainly the Yakut-Russian type of bilingualism is observed, and it can be said that almost all residents have switched to the Yakut language. erved their majority language.

The survey that we conducted during the expedition made it possible to define the level of distribution and use of Evenk language in the village of Tyanya of Olyokma District. 120 people were surveyed, which is about 1/3 of the number of the Evenks living in the village. The survey included a group of questions about the informants' language competence. Based on the results of the survey, we were able to divide the residents of Tyanya village into the following linguistic communities: 1) Evenk-Yakut bilinguals (3.6% of the total number of respondents); 2) Evenk-Yakut-Russian (72.9%); 3) Yakut-Russian bilinguals (23.5%). Most Evenks are Yakut-speaking. Only 44.7% of the respondents have pres

**Table 2.** Number of indigenous peoples of the North of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) (according to the All-Russian census of the Russian Federation in 2010)

№	Indigenous people of the North	Total number in RF (people)	Including in SR (Y) (people)	in % from the total number	consider the language native (people)	In % from the total number
1	Evenk	38396	21008	54,7	4802	12,5
2	Even	21830	15071	69	5656	25,9
3	Yukaghir	1603	1281	80	370	23,1
4	Chukchi	15908	670	4,2	5095	32
5	Dolgan	7885	1906	24,2	1054	13,4/55

The situation among the Evenks of Iengra village is different – the Evenk-Russian type of bilingualism is observed here. Almost all Evenks speak their native language to varying degrees. All Evenks in the village speak Russian. In mixed families, Russian is the main language of everyday communication. The Evenk language is spoken only with the older relatives. In purely Evenk families, parents most often speak Russian with children and among themselves. The Evenk language is mainly used to discuss the topics they want to hide from the children or strangers.

According to the survey, all Iengra adult Evenks would like their children to be able to speak their native language. In addition, they believe that it would be good if Evenk language were taught at kindergartens and schools. Most Evenk children also expressed a desire to know their native language. Almost all the respondents (except 3 people) aged 26 to 60 indicated that they learned their native language

in the family; they have been fluent in their native language since childhood and can write and read Evenk.

Thus, the position of Evenk language has been changing in two opposite directions simultaneously. On the one hand, after receiving the Cyrillic alphabet, Evenk language became a written language; the norms of the so-called literary Evenk language, based on the Poligus dialect, were formed; the measures to spread this language standard to all spheres of use of Evenk language have been taken, largely in vain. On the other hand, the number of people speaking Evenk fluently has been reducing steadily; Yakut and Russian language are becoming a universal communication standard in both public and private life.

At present, the residents of Yakutia note that the native language is very poorly spread among the Evenks, with forecasts regarding its future being quite pessimistic. However, a simple statement of

this situation seems to be too general an assessment. The level of native language proficiency is not the same among different age groups of Yakutia's population and in different regions. Conducting a more detailed analysis of the modern linguistic situation in the future seems interesting.

The process of replacing Evenk language with Yakut and Russian in everyday communication, turning it into a kind of ethnic rarity, fits into the timeframe of upbringing about 3 generations. In turn, the fieldwork material makes it possible to clearly distinguish three age groups matching them among the residents of the surveyed settlements of Tyanya (Olyokma District), Iengra (Neryungri District), and Khatystyr (Aldan District).

For the people of the older generation, born in the 1930s-1940s, Evenk language is native in the full sense of that word; as remembered by them, it was the language of their communication with their parents, they still freely communicate in Evenk with their families. Quite often, their children, and even more so grandchildren, are unable to adequately respond in Evenk, but there is no information about the cases when old people force their families to communicate in the native language. In general, the people of this generation slightly disfavor the ignorance of the native language by anyone in the family, but they do not make any attempts to change this situation.

Most adults, born in the 1950s-1960s, use Yakut and Russian languages in most life situations. Nevertheless, as a rule, the representatives of this generation consider they know the Evenk language at a simple level. Fieldwork observations show that a long conversation, even a completely everyday one, in the Evenk language is quite rare and is usually limited to a few short remarks.

Youth speaks Evenk even less; the language has become a school subject rather than a living means of communication.

We see that at present, the spoken Evenk linguistic environment does not really exist or is extremely deformed. It is obvious that the fragmentary information possessed by modern youth cannot be considered a language. That is why, it is no accident so many of our middle-aged informants are confident enough to say that they know their native language and are fluent in it. The mass media, the education system – all these mainstream information resources, should, in one way or another, be aimed at forming the ethnic identity. However, this is also a very difficult problem.

The results of monitoring the functional distribution (linguistic distribution, the natural combination of languages with each other) revealed the respondents' dissatisfaction with the volume of broadcasts in the languages of the indigenous peoples of the North, including Evenk. At present, the linguistic ratio of television programs in the republic does not differ from the traditional one: 62% of broadcasting is in Russian, 38% in Yakut,

1% in the languages of the indigenous peoples of the North, including Evenk.

## 4 Conclusion

In this regard, in the context of international experience and the experience of language legislation, the task is to develop new guidelines and priorities to preserve and develop the linguistic and cultural diversity in the republic.

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