The Language Situation in the Eveno-Bytantaiskii National District of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)

ANTONINA VINOKUROVA, IRENA KHOKHOLOVA, BORIS OSIPOV, STEPAN PAVLOV, YANA TOKHTOBINA, AND VILYUYANA PLATONOVA

Abstract: The findings of this study relate primarily to the processes of globalization that directly affect linguistic shift and present a threat of extinction to the cultures and languages of the peoples of the world. The article is based on the results of sociolinguistic research conducted in 2021 by the authors in the Eveno-Bytantaiskii National District of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). The aim of the research is to study the linguistic situation of a settlement of Tiugiasirs, where the Sakha, Russian (predominantly), and Even languages all coexist. Sociolinguistic interviews were conducted, aimed at studying the linguistic biography of the informants, determining the degree of language proficiency, and assessing the linguistic situation in the study area. The survey results show that the Even language is undergoing a linguistic shift due to the assimilation of the Even language by the Sakha language.

Keywords: Even language, indigenous peoples of the North, language revitalization, linguistic situation, Sakha language, sociolinguistics

This study investigates processes of globalization and urbanization as they directly affect linguistic shift and threaten the extinction of the cultures and languages of many peoples of the world. Indigenous cultures and languages remain particularly sensitive to these processes. We focus on the Even dialect of the Western Tiugiasirs, an indigenous minority group of the Sakha Republic, which has so far been insufficiently studied by researchers. It should be noted that, according to the UNESCO Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger, the Even language is considered severely endangered, while the Sakha language is considered vulnerable. Proceeding from the above-mentioned problems, the
The goal of our research was to assess the linguistic situation the Eveno-Bytantaiskii National District of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). It is expected that the results of this study will shed light on the linguistic situation in the district and contribute to the development and implementation of a regional strategy for the preservation of languages and cultures of the peoples of the North and the Arctic within the Russian Federation.

The Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) is the largest subject of the Russian Federation, with the largest part of its territory located in the permafrost zone. According to the Government Decree of the Russian Federation No. 1946 dated 16 November 2021, the entire territory is fully included in the category of the Far North. On 13 May 2019, the President of the Russian Federation signed Decree No. 220 “On the Land Areas of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation,” in which 13 districts of Yakutia were included within the Arctic zone, including the entire territory of the Eveno-Bytantaiskii National District.

In the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), the state languages are Russian and Sakha. The Sakha language is recognized as an official state language. The Law of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) adopted on 20 February 2004, “On the status of languages of indigenous peoples of the North in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia),” 111-3 N 243-III, states that “the languages of the small-numbered indigenous minorities of the North, the national heritage of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), shall be under the protection of the State. The languages of the small-numbered indigenous peoples of the North of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) include the Dolgan, Chukchi, Even, Evenki, and Yukaghir languages. This law is aimed at creating conditions for the preservation and the equitable and independent development of the languages of the indigenous peoples of the North.”

An earlier law of the Russian Federation gave the national republics the right to establish their own state languages on a par with the state languages of the Russian Federation for use in public authorities and regional self-government bodies. However, this law provides for the use of indigenous languages only in local governments, that is, in places where speakers of these languages are concentrated. The use of indigenous languages in other government bodies, organizations, and institutions is not provided by this law (Iadreev 2019: 37). During our fieldwork, we noticed that in some buildings of local and regional significance there were signs with the name of the organization in three languages: Russian, Yakut, and Even.
In accordance with article 2, paragraph 2 of the aforementioned 2004 law, the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) guarantees the minority indigenous peoples of the North, irrespective of their numbers, equal rights to preserve and fully develop their native languages and to freely choose their language of communication, child rearing, and education. The government of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) develops targeted programs to preserve, study, and promote the languages of the indigenous minorities of the North, and implements measures to support such programs. Thus, in 1999, as part of the implementation of these programs in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), the Experimental Boarding School “Arctic” with In-Depth Study of Humanitarian and Cultural Subjects was established in the town of Neriungri, where children receive a quality education and study their native languages. In 2020, the International Arctic School was founded in Yakutsk, where children, through international baccalaureate programs and in-depth study of foreign languages, can choose to study the languages and cultures of the indigenous peoples of the North. Emphasizing the peculiarity of the regional education system, which plays a significant role in the preservation and development of the languages and cultures of the peoples of the North, it is separately worth noting the presence of “nomadic schools” in the republic. Nomadic schools provide educational processes in accordance with the traditional way of life of the indigenous peoples (Ignateva and Maklashova 2020).

Currently, the study of the languages of the indigenous peoples of the North is carried out in 40 secondary schools of the republic, where Even is studied in 19 schools (718 students) while 113 children study in the aforementioned nomadic schools. It should be noted that in Sebian-Kiuel’skaya (Kobiaiskii district) and Berezovskaa (Srednekolymskii district) schools, primary school education is conducted exclusively in the native language. As a separate subject, native languages are studied in 15 stationary schools and 7 nomadic schools. In other schools, mother tongues are studied in the form of an optional class (Sharina 2019: 156).

The Eveno-Bytantaiskii National District (see Fig. 1) is one of the newest districts to be assigned this national status, separated from the Verkhoianskii District and formed on 21 April 1989, on the basis of the Resolution of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Yakut ASSR on that day, subsequently approved by the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR dated 13 August 1989 and the Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Yakut ASSR № 375 dated 11 December 1989. The Eveno-Bytantaiskii National District (or ulus)
was created not only because of socio-economic interests, but also certainly because of political considerations in view of the desire of the indigenous population to revive the Even National District (Filippova 2018), thereby preserving and supporting the concentrated settlement (kompaktne prozhivanie, literally “compact residence”) of the Even, their culture, and their language.

The capital of the national district is the village, Batagai-Alyta. Its distance to the city of Yakutsk is 1800 km. In its history, the area underwent several changes to administrative-territorial divisions and formations. The Sakkyryrskii area was set aside as an Even district in January 1931, by a meeting of the Yakutsk Central Executive Committee. It joined several other established Even areas: Anabarskii, Bulunskii, Zhiganskii, Ust’-Ianskii, Allaikhovskii, Viliui-Markhinskii, Tomponksii, Momskii, and Tommotskii, with the approval of representatives from Even tribal councils. The resolution also makes mention of the exclusion of Tiugiasirskii nasleg (the smallest administrative

Figure 1. Eveno-Bytantaiskii National District (locally referred to as an ulus)
unit in Yakutia) from the former Verkhoianskii District as well as the exclusion of Lamynkhinskii nasleg from the Ust’-Aldanskii District, and the formation of the Sakkyryrskii District on their basis. Batagai-Alyta was selected as the administrative center. As of 1945, the district included four village councils: Verkhne-Bytantaiskii, Lamynkhinskii, Nizhne-Bytantaiskii, and Tiugiasirskii. The Sakkyryrskii District existed from 1931 until 1963, when the district was abolished and the territory of the Sakkyryrskii District (Lamynkha) was incorporated into the Kobiaiskii District and the Verkhoianskii district. According to the 1939 census, 2255 people lived in Sakkyryrskii District, of which 45.5 per cent were Sakha, 39.8 per cent were Evens, and 12.9 per cent were Russians. According to the census of 1959, 2,595 people lived in Sakkyryrskii District.

The permanent population as of 1 January 2021 is 2,879 people. It consists of three heritage districts: Tiugiasirskii (Batagai-Alyta village) with a population of 1,897 people; Nizhne-Bytantaiskii (Kustur village) with 733 people; and Verkhne-Bytantaiskii (Dzhargalakh village) with 249 people. According to the 2010 population census, in the Eveno-Bytantaiskii Region, Evens accounted for 53.05 per cent of the population, Sakha for 44.37 per cent, Russians for 0.87 per cent, Evenki for 0.56 per cent, and others for 0.94 per cent (see Table 1).

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<td>Evens</td>
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<td>53.05%</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Sakha</td>
<td>1272</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Russians</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Evenki</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>27</td>
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**Linguistic Situation and Linguistic Shift**

In the 1930s, the term “language situation” was first used in scientific circulation, and sociolinguistic studies began in the 1960s and 1970s. According to Nikolai Vakhtin, the crucial role in the development of
sociolinguistics was played by V. A. Avrorin. In Avrorin’s understanding, the language situation is “a specific type of interaction between languages and different forms of their existence in the social life of every nation at this stage of its historical development” (Avrorin 1975: 127).

Vakhtin and Evgenii Golovko pay attention to the attachment of the language situation to a certain territory and represent the language situation as “a set of forms of existence of one language or a set of several languages in their social and functional interaction within certain territories: regions or administrative and political entities” (Vakhtin and Golovko 2004). In The Dictionary of Sociolinguistic Terms V. Iu. Mikhal’chenko gives the following definition for the term language situation: “a set of forms of existence of one language or a set of languages in their territorial and social relationship and functional interaction within the boundaries of certain geographical regions or administrative and political entities” (Mikhal’chenko 2006: 266). Thus, the language situation is defined as a complex of languages or types of functioning of one language, as well as social and functional relations between them in a certain territory.

Language shift poses a threat to the survival of minority languages in the North of Russia. Language shift in our study refers to “the social causes, mechanisms, and consequences of the loss of the titular language community,” as defined by Vakhtin (Vakhtin 2001: 125). Language shift is described as a “gradual and progressive transition from one language to another, and a shift may occur over several generations, along with the gradual shrinking of the social spheres or domains in which the language was originally used” (Thomson 1988: 100).

Soviet and Russian researchers writing about the linguistic situation of the Russian North in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have noted that the linguistic shift for some ethnic groups is largely characterized by Russian bilingualism (Gurvich 1956) and the replacement of the heritage language by Sakha (in the case of Evens and Yukaghirs) (Vakhtin 2001). According to researchers, the reasons for the oppression of small-numbered peoples’ languages, particularly Even, are the growth of the Russian-speaking population, the expansion of collective farms, the forced relocation of native peoples from their traditional habitats during the Soviet era, and the reduction of language instruction in schools (Neroznak 1994: 71; Vakhtin 2001: 120). Today “a serious impediment to the development of local languages” is instituting “the Unified State Exam [edinyi gosudarstvennyi ekzamen] in the Russian Federation, which requires nation-wide testing in Russian” (Grenoble 2013: 796). Under sovereignty in the 1990s, after the collapse
of the Soviet Union, local authorities attempted to revive minority languages with “the expansion of school education, the most significant measure that has been implemented over the past decade and a half to save small languages. But for many languages this measure is clearly insufficient” (Alpatov 2005). We agree that this measure is insufficient, because the literary dialect of minority languages, which is prescribed in textbooks, comes into conflict with spoken dialects. Today, another trend has emerged among young people: urban and sometimes rural schoolchildren often do not speak their ancestral language. Many young people whose parents are ethnic Even and who consider Sakha their native language choose Russian as “a spoken language in their families and with friends due to the influence of TV, Internet channels, and social networks” (Ivanova 2019).

Another factor contributing to language shift is an ideology whereby language standardization is “often seen as privileging one variety over another (or all others) and thus can be perceived as a threat to dialect diversity” (Grenoble 2013: 798). As language shift progresses, we find the mutual influence of several dialects simultaneously, as well as the emergence of new varieties altogether. Linguists distinguish a total of 20 dialects in the Even language, which are sub-divided into groups. These, in turn, are grouped into larger categories based on linguistic and regional factors. In total there are three major regional dialect groups in the Even language: Eastern, Central, and Western. This separation of the language into many local varieties is caused, first of all, by the vast territory of the Even population, which stretches across most of Eastern Siberia. The Evens came into contact with different language groups: Yukaghirs (Yukaghir-Chuvan, Uralic), Sakha (Turkic), as well as Koryaks and Chukchi (Paleosiberian). There are different points of view regarding the genetic affiliation of the Yukaghir language, but V. I. Jochelson concludes that “the internal and external development of this language is completely different from the Ural-Altaic languages” based on the fact that, in the language of the Yukaghirs, “words merge into one word” (Jochelson 1899). These kinds of morphological changes are a feature of incorporating (poly-synthetic) languages, which include the languages of the Chukchi, Koryaks, Eskimos, and American Indians. In a contradicting point of view, H. Paasonen writes that the Yukaghir and Finno-Ugric languages have a number of lexical correspondences, as well as closeness in the field of word formation (Paasonen 1906).

This contact gave rise to local variants of the Even language that have their own lexical, morphological, and (to some extent) phonetic
features. For example, in the Allaikhovskii dialect there are many lexical borrowings from the Yukaghir language, such as niŋile “fire,” kjaga “bear,” ondi “water.” The standard (literary) Even language is based on the Olskii dialect from the Eastern group. For example, in our study area—in the Eveno-Byntaïskii district—we revealed the Sakkyryrskii dialect. For attestations from this dialect in dictionaries, the notation “Sk” and “Tg” are used (for Sakkyryrskii and Tiugiasirskii). According to I. S. Gurvich, the ethnonym of the Tiugiasir Evens is evidently of totemic origin from the name of the bird, Tyugyas (Gurvich 1956: 42), which in translation from the Even language means “winter bird” (V. Robbek and M. Robbek 2005: 255). There is only fragmentary information about this dialect in the literature (Tsintsius 1946; Novikova 1960).

Previous research on this region includes a study conducted by K. A. Novikova (1913–1984) from July to November 1953 in Yakutsk and the Sakkyryrskii region. Novikova was an employee of the local branch of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, aiming to collect materials on the Even language to gain “information of historical and ethnographic nature” (Suleimanov 2016).

According to A. A. Burykin, the Tiugiasir dialect of Even belongs to the Sakkyryrskii division of the Western Even dialect group. Burykin notes that the Sakkyryrskii dialect is characterized by noticeable differences compared to Central and Eastern dialects, primarily in the vocabulary, due to a large number of Sakha borrowings (Burykin 2004: 384).

In considering the sound system of the Western Evens, M. I. Matusevich wrote the following: “The isolation of the far western accents is partly explained by the fact that they have been influenced by the Sakha language. Most of the representatives of these accents are bilingual, fluent in both their ethnic language and Sakha” (Matusevich 1979: 202). Linguistically, this dialect is the closest to the Lamunkhinskii variety. In the 1960s, it was noted that the Lamunkhinskii variety was very different both phonetically and lexically from the Eastern dialects, so much so that mutual intelligibility was difficult (Novikova 1960: 18–19).

V. V. Filippova writes:

According to I. S. Gurvich, in the nineteenth century, the Eveno-Tiugiasirs were divided into three territorial-administrative clans: Southern, Central, and Northern (the ancient names of these clans are lost). Most of the Tiugiasir people belonged to the Southern clan; however, according to legends, the main clan in ancient times was the Northern clan, which seemed to have diminished as a result of clashes with the Yukaghirs. (Filippova 2018)
According to A. A. Burykin’s research, the precise territory of distribution of the Sakkyryrskii dialect, as well as all other areas of Even settlement within the borders of Yakutia, require thorough field research to establish the nature of the dialects in separate areas, the extent of the dialectal diversity of the Even language, and the borders between separate dialects.

According to S. I. Sharina, only the eastern habitat of the Evens (Kamchatka, Chukotka, Magadan Oblast’, and Khabarovsk Krai) is well studied today, while the dialectological research in Yakutia is far from complete. Therefore, the characterization of the Even languages and dialects of Yakutia, the identification of their distribution area, linguistic features, and the systematization and classification of the available data that distinguish these dialect groups from one another are of great importance for the description of the disappearing languages of the minority indigenous peoples of the North. At the same time, it is important to take into account the specifics of language use in modern conditions. Most Even people in Yakutia are historically characterized by Even-Sakha bilingualism; in the twentieth century, the situation has moved to one of Even-Sakha-Russian trilingualism (Sharina 2014).

Given these considerations about the understudied Tiugiasir dialect of the Even language and the problems of studying the language shift, we set the goal of studying the linguistic situation in the Eveno-Bytantaiskii National District.

Research Methodology

The authors collected linguistic biographies from people of the Eveno-Bytantaiskii National District of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) through a questionnaire-based interview process, to better understand the sociolinguistic ecology of the region. The interviewing involved 120 respondents—men and women of four age groups: teenagers of school age, the younger adult working population, the older working generation, and those past retirement age.

A linguistic biography aims at determining the unique history of when, where, and how a person acquired or lost a particular language. This factor is especially important when working in bilingual and multilingual settlements (such as those where combinations of Sakha, Russian, Yukaghir, Even, and Dolgan, are common). Linguistic biographies of people living in the same settlement often show similar patterns; they can be recorded by interviewing residents.
Interviews to collect linguistic biographies were conducted with respondents orally. The oral response (interview) was audio-recorded by the researchers using a recording device during fieldwork in the Eveno-Bytantaiskii National District in December 2021.

During field research in three settlements of the Eveno-Bytantaiskii National District, a questionnaire designed by Lenore Grenoble was used. This survey contains questions to determine the degree of language proficiency of each respondent. A total of 120 people participated in our sociolinguistic survey. With most respondents, the survey was conducted in the format of a conversation in the Sakha language, as most respondents speak Sakha and preferred the Sakha language for interviews. In addition, six secondary school students were interviewed in Russian and two respondents were interviewed in the Even language.

The questionnaire contained questions concerning date of birth, place of residence, language proficiency, nationality, and ancestry of the interviewee and his/her parents and both paternal and maternal grandparents. The survey also involved determining the social role of language, in particular learning details about the family, household, and professional and social roles among the respondents, and what language or languages act as a language of communication (in oral and written forms, including use in social networks) in these different spheres. The survey also asked respondents to identify their ancestral language and whether there is a need to learn it. The survey further involved identifying forms of feedback between respondents and researchers to work together on language preservation and language teaching methods.

The analysis of the results entailed reconstructing the picture of the past and describing the current situation of the languages of the Even and Sakha ethnic communities so as to establish a forecast of language shift, in order to take appropriate measures for language preservation based on the results of the study.

In general, the linguistic background questionnaire consisted of the following parts: 1) general information about the respondent; 2) linguistic information; 3) language use and the setting of indigenous languages; 4) language knowledge and skills; and 5) ideas for the future. An English translation of the survey is provided in the Appendix.
Research Results

The survey involved 120 people from three settlements: Sakkyryr (Batagai-Alyta), Kustur (Nizhne-Bytantaiskii reindeer camp), and Dzhargalakh (Verkhne-Bytantaiskii reindeer camp); 66 respondents (55 per cent) were resident in Sakkyryr (Batagai-Alyta), where Evens make up 67 per cent, Sakha 31.2 per cent, and Evenki 1.8 per cent; 34 respondents (28 per cent) were resident in Kustur village, where Evens constitute 71 per cent and Sakha 29 per cent; and 21 respondents (17 per cent) were resident in Dzhargalakh village, where Evens make up 53 per cent, Sakha 47 per cent, and Dolgans 3.7 per cent. The sample of the study is represented by four groups, which we denote as follows:

- G1: school age teenagers (23.33 per cent);
- G2: young people aged 20–35 (23.33 per cent);
- G3: middle generation 36–50 years old (27.33 per cent);
- G4: older generation 51 years and older (26.0 per cent).

We present the results of the study on the questions that provide the clearest picture of the linguistic situation in the study area.

Nationality

Out of 120 surveyed respondents, 70 per cent responded that they were of Even ethnicity, of whom 72 per cent were women and 28 per cent were men. Distribution of Evens by age group: G1—34 per cent; G2—21 per cent; G3—21 per cent; and G4—24 per cent. Sakha nationality was indicated by 29.4 per cent of respondents, of which 68.75 per cent were women and 31.25 per cent were men. Distribution of Sakha by age group: G1—25 per cent; G2—18.75 per cent; G3—18.75 per cent and G4—37.5 per cent. One respondent said she was Evenki (G3).

In our opinion, the self-identification as Evens by a predominant number of women is due to the fact that, first, the survey was attended mainly by women (68.75 per cent), and second, in the transmission of northern culture from generation to generation, as northern woman develop their roles as mother, wife, and daughter-in-law, they traditionally take on functional cultural responsibility and play the most dominant role in child rearing. The large number of indicators of Even identity among the teenagers is connected to the operation of targeted programs for the preservation and development of languages of
indigenous minorities of the North, which support school education—the Even language is taught in both pre-school and secondary general education institutions. Teachers of the Even language are graduates of the Department of Northern Philology, which was established by V. A. Robbek in 1991 as part of the Philological Faculty of the Yakutsk State University. Today, the Department of Northern Philology continues its work at the Institute of Languages and Cultures of the Peoples of the North-East of the Russian Federation at North-Eastern Federal University in Yakutsk. Today, the high level of self-identification of the Even people is also influenced by programs aimed at the revival and development of the culture of minority indigenous peoples, which will be discussed below.

Where Respondents Grew Up and Nationality

Out of 120 respondents, 85 per cent responded that they were born in Sakkyryr village, Dzhargalakh village, or Kustur village. Of these, 63 per cent were women, 37 per cent were men. Ethnic identification: 75 per cent identified as Evens (age group distribution: G1—36.5 per cent; G2—19.04 per cent; G3—20.63 per cent; and G4—23.81 per cent); 23.8 per cent identified as Sakha (age group distribution: G1—45 per cent, G2—5 per cent, G3—20 per cent, G4—30 per cent); 1.2 per cent identified as Evenki (one person in age group G2—100 per cent; this respondent was fluent Yakut and speaks Yakut both at home and outside the home).

The remaining 15 per cent grew up in or came from other localities—Srednekolymsk, Verkhoyansk, Sebian-Kiuel’, Verkhneviliuisk, Megino-Kangalasskii, Churapchinskii, Deputatskii, Abyiskii, Suntarskii, Olekminskii, etc. Of these respondents, 66.67 per cent were women, 33.33 per cent were men. Ten per cent of the G3 group indicated Even as their nationality; 10 per cent of the G3 group indicated Evenki as their nationality; and 80 per cent of respondents identified their nationality as Sakha (age distribution G2—38.46 per cent, G3—15.38 per cent, G4—46.15 per cent).

According to our survey data, the majority of respondents who identify themselves as Evens are local residents who were born and grew up in the area, namely in the villages of Kustur, Dzhargalakh, Sakkyryr. Two respondents who are native speakers of the Even language come from the settlement of Sebian-Kiuel’ and settled in the village of Kustur. Taking into consideration the advanced age (76 years) of one of the Even language speakers from Sebian-Kiuel’, who was born
in 1945 when Lamynkha, including Sebian-Kiuel’, was a part of the Sakkyryrskii district (until 1963), some clans of Evens in Sakkyryr and Sebian-Kiuel’ are connected with each other through kinship relations. Today, the village of Sebian-Kiuel’ is a place where Evens who speak the Lamunkhinskii dialect are concentrated, and 100 per cent of the residents retain their language.

Despite the lack of ethnic language proficiency, today there is a high degree of Even self-identification, probably due to the ongoing support of the Even culture within the framework of the Program on the Development and Revival of the Even Language and Culture, adopted following the formation of the Eveno-Bytantaiskii District. Today, ethnic performance groups operate at the Sakkyryr House of Culture, a folk theatre. These groups include the dance ensemble “Tugusil,” the youth ensemble “Mirgilan,” and the folklore ensemble “Upend’el.” At the Kustur House of Culture, there is the youth ensemble “Gevan” and the ensemble “Aartyk.” Finally, the Dzhargalakh House of Culture has the youth ensemble “Dergelgen.” These ensembles play a special role in the preservation of the Even culture and function as a kind of translator of Even cultural heritage from generation to generation, because dances and performances of Even people are accompanied by singing in the Even language. In this context, the Even language acts as the language of Even cultural heritage.

**Language of Fluent Communication**

Across all three areas, 74.51 per cent of respondents indicated the Sakha language was the language they speak fluently, of which 75 per cent were women and 25 per cent were men. Sakha ethnicity was claimed by 53.95 per cent (age distribution: G1—12.20 per cent; G2—21.95 per cent; G3—21.95 per cent; G4—29.27 per cent). Among Sakha-identifying respondents, 4.55 per cent indicated that they speak two languages, Sakha and Russian. Of those claiming Even ethnicity, 46.05 per cent are fluent in the Sakha language (age distribution: G1—14.29 per cent; G2—25.71 per cent; G3—25.71 per cent; G4—34.29 per cent), while 25.49 per cent of Even respondents indicated that they were bilingual. Of these, 69.23 per cent indicated they were bilingual in Sakha and Russian (age distribution: G1—66.67 per cent; G2—11.11 per cent; G3—11.11 per cent; G4—11.11 per cent); bilingualism in Russian and Yakut (Sakha) (with Russian dominance) was reported by 15.38 per cent of G1 women; and Sakha-Even bilingualism was indicated by 15.38 per cent
of respondents, who were women in age groups G3 and G4. Data on language proficiency in the three villages are provided separately in the following tables (see Tables 2–4).

According to Table 2, we can see that the G1 group of Even students communicate freely in two languages, Sakha and Russian, which indicates the trend of increasing communication among children in Russian, due to the influence of the Internet, as the village of Sakkyryr has more or less stable Internet access. Such a fairly high indicator of Sakha-Russian bilingualism among schoolchildren (29.8 per cent) can also be due to the fact that the Even language classes are taught through Russian. According to the respondents’ answers, parents were enrolling their children in the Even class so that their child could pass the USE (Unified State Examination) successfully, since teaching in the Even class was conducted in Russian. In addition, the respondents considered the Sakha language to be difficult to learn; 38.3 per cent of respondents believe that the Sakha language is much more difficult to learn than Russian. It is the grammar of the Sakha language that causes most challenges; it is difficult even for the adult population. The situation is also aggravated by the fact that new textbooks on the Sakha language are very complicated: for example, well-known terms are replaced by new Yakut (Sakha) terms, while old vocabulary is used in tasks, words that have long since gone out of frequent use. Therefore, it is difficult for parents to even explain to children their homework, because they themselves do not understand the meaning of obsolete words; because

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</table>

Table 2. “In which language do you communicate fluently?” (among Evens in Sakkyryr village)

According to Table 3, we can see that the G1 group of Even students communicate in three languages: Sakha, Sakha/Russian, and Sakha/Even, which indicates the trend of increasing communication among children in Russian, due to the influence of the Internet, as the village of Kustur has more or less stable Internet access. Such a fairly high indicator of Sakha-Russian bilingualism among schoolchildren (29.8 per cent) can also be due to the fact that the Even language classes are taught through Russian. According to the respondents’ answers, parents were enrolling their children in the Even class so that their child could pass the USE (Unified State Examination) successfully, since teaching in the Even class was conducted in Russian. In addition, the respondents considered the Sakha language to be difficult to learn; 38.3 per cent of respondents believe that the Sakha language is much more difficult to learn than Russian. It is the grammar of the Sakha language that causes most challenges; it is difficult even for the adult population. The situation is also aggravated by the fact that new textbooks on the Sakha language are very complicated: for example, well-known terms are replaced by new Yakut (Sakha) terms, while old vocabulary is used in tasks, words that have long since gone out of frequent use. Therefore, it is difficult for parents to even explain to children their homework, because they themselves do not understand the meaning of obsolete words; because

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>G1</th>
<th>G2</th>
<th>G3</th>
<th>G4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sakha</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sakha/Russian</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sakha/Even</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. “In which language do you communicate fluently?” (among Evens in Kustur village)
The Language Situation in the Eveno-Bytantaiskii National District

of this, they have to spend a lot of time looking for the meanings of unfamiliar words in dictionaries, then explaining them to the child.

In Table 3 we see that monolingualism in the Sakha language also prevails in Kustur. Only 15.38 per cent of respondents speak two languages—Sakha and Even in groups G3 and G4. These include residents of the village who were originally natives of the village Sebian-Kiueld (Emma Vasilievna Zakharova and Maria Denisovna Stepanova), discussed in more detail below.

According to Table 4, in Dzhargalakh village the language of free communication for the entire population is the Sakha language. In Dzhargalakh village there is an understaffed school, so the authors were not able to interview schoolchildren. It should be noted that the school in Dzhargalakh has no Even language class, as there is no specialist in the Even language.

### Language of Communication at Home

While maintaining ethnic self-identification, the language of family communication at home among Evens is Sakha for 85.47 per cent of respondents, while 8.33 per cent are bilingual (Russian-Sakha or Sakha-Russian), 4.17 speak a mixture of languages, while 2.08 per cent gave no response.

While maintaining ethnic self-identification, the language of communication within the family among Evenks is Sakha for 62 per cent of respondents, while 36 per cent communicate in Russian and Sakha languages, and 9.4 per cent communicate in Sakha and Even languages.

As can be seen from the data (see Tables 5–7), the main language of communication for the majority of Even and Sakha respondents is the Sakha language. But there are families where both Russian and Sakha are spoken. Communication in Russian in the family prevails in those families with children of school age (G1), predominantly among the Sakha in Sakkryr (29.4 per cent), slightly less in Kustur (12.5 per cent). Among the Evens, there is relatively less communication in Russian

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<tr>
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<th>G1</th>
<th>G2</th>
<th>G3</th>
<th>G4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G1</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G2</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G3</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. “In which language do you communicate fluently?” (among Evens in Dzhargalakh village)
The younger the generation, the greater the tendency to communicate in two languages (Sakha and Russian), which is indicative of processes of globalization and the influence of Internet communication.

The respondents who indicated Sakha-Even communication were again Emma Vasilievna Zakharova and Maria Denisovna Stepanova. Emma Vasilievna, 76 years old, an Even woman, was born and grew up in a reindeer-herding community in the Even village of Sebian-Kiuel’. According to the respondent, in the past, this village was part of the Sakkyryrskii District of the Yakut ASSR. Recalling the earliest years of her life, Emma Vasilievna notes that her parents always worked in reindeer herding. Her father was an “advanced worker” and member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. They lived in a chuma (tent, called ylumu in Even), and when she was eight years old, the whole family moved to the village. It was at that time that Emma Vasilievna went to school. The teaching was conducted in the Even language. Teachers of an ethnic Russian background who came to work in the Sebian-Kiuel’ school quickly mastered the Even language. However, it was difficult for Sakha speakers to adapt due to the fact that they did not want to know the Even language. In Sebian-Kiuel’, Russian children spoke both Even and their native language well:

### Table 5. Language of Communication at Home (Sakkyryr village)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>G1</th>
<th>G2</th>
<th>G3</th>
<th>G4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sakha</td>
<td>Evens: 31.9% Sakha: 17.7%</td>
<td>Evens: 25% Sakha: 11.7%</td>
<td>Evens: 8.5% Sakha: 17.7%</td>
<td>Evens: 17% Sakha: 23.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sakha/Russian</td>
<td>Evens: 10.6% Sakha: 29.4%</td>
<td>Evens: 5%</td>
<td>Evens: 2%</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evenki</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

in the family: 10.6 per cent in Sakkyryr, 4.7 per cent in Kustur. The younger the generation, the greater the tendency to communicate in two languages (Sakha and Russian), which is indicative of processes of globalization and the influence of Internet communication.

### Table 6. Language of Communication at Home (Kustur village)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>G1</th>
<th>G2</th>
<th>G3</th>
<th>G4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sakha</td>
<td>Evens: 23.9% Sakha: 12.5%</td>
<td>Evens: 4.7%</td>
<td>Evens: 28.7% Sakha: 37.5%</td>
<td>Evens: 23.9% Sakha: 50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sakha/Russian</td>
<td>Evens: 4.7%</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Evens: 4.7%</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sakha/Even</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Evens: 4.7%</td>
<td>Evens: 4.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Njuchidit dien, obodit dien butunnuven javrar noŋorton, xurdēk bihitnen nṯāt kuŋalni”
\[\text{njuʧidit dien, obodit dien butuːnːuβɛn jaːβɾaɾ noŋɔɾtɔn, huɾdɛːk bihitnɛn ɲuːt kuŋalɲi}\]
(“Both in Russian and in Even they spoke well, the children of Russians were very capable”).

After receiving her basic general secondary education, Emma Vasilievna returned to the reindeer herding group. Since her childhood, she has been fluent in three languages: Even, Sakha and Russian. All her relatives, who live in Sebian-Kiuel’, know the local Even language. She occasionally speaks with them on the phone. After getting married, she moved to Kustur village and met elderly people who are speakers of the Tiugiasir dialect of the Even language:

“Obodichākan töreri xāvdil bixitnon, ibgo bixin tarakam. Butunnu kōkēritnon.”
\[\text{ɔbɔdiʧaːkan [toːɾɛɾi] [haːβdil] [bihitnɔn], [ibɡɔ] [bihin] [tarakam].}
\[\text{[butunːu] [kɔːkɛɾiɲɔn]}\]
(“They spoke only in Even then, it was good. Everyone died”).

According to Emma Vasilievna, there is no significant difference between Lamunkhinskii and Tiugiasirskii speech which was spoken by Kustur elders in the 1970s:

“Ibgot ukchenmeddeketon xo̱nten achcha, tük esten ukchenmekkerer, ömen atikan bixni-da omŋacha.”
\[\text{ibɡɔːt ukʧəːnmɛddɛkɛtnɔːn hoːntən aːʧːa, tiːk ɛstɛn ukʧəːnməkːəɾəɾ,}
\[\text{ömen atikan bihni-da omŋaʧa}\]
(“We communicated well, there are no differences, now no one talks, there was one old woman, but she forgot”).

Emma Vasilievna’s husband passed away long ago; he worked as a builder and was Sakha by nationality. They had four children and spoke Sakha at home. She used to read different books and newspapers written in Russian and Sakha, but now she is visually impaired. Emma likes listening to children’s performances on the radio and never misses the Gevan TV program. She speaks in the Even language every day on the phone with her relatives from Sebian-Kiuel’. She speaks Russian only when she is addressed in this language. Most of the time she speaks Sakha.
Maria Denisovna, 43, an Even of the Niaku clan, was born and grew up in the village of Sebian-Kiuel’. She obtained a general secondary education in the secondary school of Sebian-Kiuel’ and graduated from the higher educational institution in Yakutsk. After five years of study at Yakut State University, she got a job as a teacher of Even language and literature in Kusturskii secondary school in the village of Kustur. Maria Denisovna’s parents are of Even ethnicity; they are both speakers of the Lamunkhinskii dialect of the Even language. In addition, they speak Sakha and Russian. Maria Denisovna communicated in Even not only with them, but also with her grandparents. Her father (born in 1953) worked as a driver, and her mother (born in 1955) was a housewife. She communicates with her siblings in both Even and Sakha. She speaks Russian and Sakha with her friends, and speaks Russian with her relatives in the town. She communicates in Even with her relatives from Sebian-Kiuel’.

Compared to the two previous settlements of Kustur and Sakkyryr, Dzhargalakh village is relatively monolingual in Sakha. However, schoolchildren in this village did not participate in our study. According to the respondents’ answers—in particular according to the teachers’ observations—senior school pupils communicate in Sakha, but primary school children communicate with each other in Russian while at school. Communication in Russian is based on the influence of the Internet (YouTube, Tik-Tok, etc.) on young children who have Wi-Fi installed at home.

**Language Considered the Language of Ancestors**

Most of the Even people consider the language of their ancestors to be Even, but a small number of them indicated Sakha as their ancestral language. The reasons for such a response include: 1) ignorance of the ancestral language (Even), since they have been speaking Sakha since their early childhood; 2) they were born in a mixed marriage where one...
The Language Situation in the Eveno-Bytantaiskii National District

of the parents is Sakha, where communication between the child and the parent takes place in Sakha; and 3) the functioning of Sakha as the state language along with Russian in all spheres of activity in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), as well as in the family as a social institution.

The small number of Evens in Sakkyryr village indicating that their ancestral language is Sakha (see Table 8) is explained by the fact that the Sakha language, as the state language, prevails in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) in all spheres of activity, including in the family. For example, in one illustrative case, a schoolchild (13 years old) whose parents are both Even, and whose mother knows Even and Evenki, believes that she is an Even, but at the same time considers Sakha the language of her ancestors, because she has been speaking Sakha since childhood and her father was raised speaking the Sakha language. This indicates a linguistic shift—the replacement of the Even language by the Sakha language in the third generation.

In Kustur village as well (see Table 9), respondents who self-identified as Even (age distribution G1—9.6 per cent; G2—9.6 per cent) indicated the Sakha language as the language of their ancestors, as the respondents were born in a mixed marriage where the father is Even and the mother is Sakha. In the family, usually the mother transmits her language to the children through their upbringing. Accordingly, the language of communication in the family was the Sakha language. However, the respondents’ self-identification is patrilineal—Even.

<p>| Table 8. “Which language do you consider to be the language of your ancestors” (Sakkyryr village) |
|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>G1</th>
<th>G2</th>
<th>G3</th>
<th>G4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Even</td>
<td>Evens: 40%</td>
<td>Evens: 26%</td>
<td>Evens: 12.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sakha</td>
<td>Evens: 2.1%</td>
<td>Sakha: 11.8%</td>
<td>Sakha: 17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sakha</td>
<td>Evens: 47.1%</td>
<td>Sakha: 11.8%</td>
<td>Sakha: 17.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| Table 9. “Which language do you consider to be the language of your ancestors?” (Kustur village) |
|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>G1</th>
<th>G2</th>
<th>G3</th>
<th>G4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Even</td>
<td>Evens: 28.5%</td>
<td>Evens: 4.7%</td>
<td>Evens: 23.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sakha</td>
<td>Sakha: 12.5%</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Evens: 9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sakha: 37.5%</td>
<td>Sakha: 50%</td>
<td>Sakha: 50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the village of Dzhargalakh, the language of one’s ancestors lines up entirely with ethnic self-identification (see Table 10). Where Evens chose Even language, Sakha chose Sakha language, and Dolgans chose Dolgan language.

**Study of the Native Language**

Among respondents who identified as Even, 40 per cent study or have studied the Even language (age distribution: G1—22 per cent; G2—4.5 per cent; G3—6 per cent; G4—7.5 per cent); 60 per cent have not.

Table 11 shows that 51 per cent of the respondents in Sakkyryr were taught the Even language in school, predominantly age groups G1 and G2. These groups belong to the generation who were taught and studied with the support of regional programs adopted by the government of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia): an initiative of renewal and development of national schools (1991), an initiative of school language education (2001); the government program of targeted language development in the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) (2005–2007); the government program for “preservation, study and development of state and official languages of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia)” (2012–2016); and the initiative for the preservation and development of languages of minority indigenous peoples of the North (2019).

The remaining 49 per cent of the Even respondents were not taught their ethnic language. The low rates among age groups G3 and G4, according to the respondents’ answers, are due to the absence of formal

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<th>G1</th>
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<th>G3</th>
<th>G4</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Even</td>
<td></td>
<td>Evens: 33.3%</td>
<td>Evens: 33.3%</td>
<td>Evens: 33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sakha</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sakha: 50%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sakha: 50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolgan</td>
<td></td>
<td>100% (Dolgans)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 10. “Which language do you consider to be the language of your ancestors?” (Dzhargalakh village)

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>G1</th>
<th>G2</th>
<th>G3</th>
<th>G4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Evens: 32%</td>
<td>Evens: 8.5%</td>
<td>Evens: 6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td>Evens: 10.6%</td>
<td>Evens: 17%</td>
<td>Evens: 6.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11. “Have you tried to study your native language?” (Sakkyryr village)
Even language learning in their youth. The fact that there was no attempt to learn the Even language for age group G1 is due to the role of the Russian Federation’s law on the choice of language of instruction, where the choice is generally given to one’s legal guardians. In addition, a negative answer to this question may be due to the fact that the children were born in a mixed marriage where the shared language is Sakha.

Table 12 shows that, in Kustur village, 43 per cent of the respondents were taught the Even language. Kustur village is a place where Eveno-Tiugiasirs are concentrated and, according to historical records, is the ancestral homeland of the Even people. This setting likely explains the affirmative answers of respondents in age groups G1 and G4 to the question “Have you tried to learn your native language?” However, during the Soviet period, age groups G3 and G4 had no opportunity to learn the Even language in pre-school and secondary school education, as education in this district was exclusively conducted in Sakha and Russian.

Negative answers for age group G1 are explained by the fact that, at present in Kustur, the Even language is taught only in primary grades. In high school the Even language is offered only as an elective.

The prevailing majority of negative answers (55.5 per cent) in Dzhargalakh village to the question “Have you tried to study your native language?” (see Table 13) is related to the historical circumstances of the Verkhne-Bytantaiskii heritage population. The majority of this population is considered to be native Sakha. Evens living in this settlement had no opportunity to be taught the Even language during the Soviet years. In the 1990s, an Even language class was introduced,

Table 12. “Have you tried to study your native language?” (Kustur village)

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<th>G1</th>
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<th>G3</th>
<th>G4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Evens: 9.6%</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Evens: 4.8%</td>
<td>Evens: 14.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Evens: 19%</td>
<td>Evens: 4.8%</td>
<td>Evens: 28.6%</td>
<td>Evens: 19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13. “Have you tried to study your native language?” (Dzhargalakh village)

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>G1</th>
<th>G2</th>
<th>G3</th>
<th>G4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Evens: 11.1%</td>
<td>Evens: 11.1%</td>
<td>Evens: 22.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Evens: 22.2%</td>
<td>Evens: 22.2%</td>
<td>Evens: 11.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
but following the departure of the Even language teacher, further Even language training ceased. At present, there are no specialists in the Even language at the school, but the pre-school institution conducts classes in the Even language, as well as cultural events, such as the traditional holiday “Evinek.” In Dzhargalakh village, the People’s Association of Evens of the village of Dzhargalakh (under the leadership of Olga Dmitrievna Nikitina) actively holds cultural events and conducts a circle teaching Even arts.

**Felt Need to Study One’s Ethnic Language**

Of the surveyed Evens, 71.21 per cent wish to know the Even language (at least at the household level); age distribution: G1—17 per cent; G2—21 per cent; G3—18 per cent; G4—15 per cent.

According to these indicators, the majority answered affirmatively to the question “Is it necessary to study one’s ethnic language?” (71.21 per cent). Consequently, the motivation to study the ethnic language

| Table 14. “Is it necessary to study one’s ethnic language?” (Sakkyryr village) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>G1</th>
<th>G2</th>
<th>G3</th>
<th>G4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Evens: 25.6%</td>
<td>Evens: 25.6%</td>
<td>Evens: 12.7%</td>
<td>Evens: 19.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Evens: 12.7%</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t know</td>
<td>Evens: 4.3%</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Table 15. “Do I need to learn my ethnic language?” (Kustur village) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>G1</th>
<th>G2</th>
<th>G3</th>
<th>G4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Evens: 19%</td>
<td>Evens: 4.8%</td>
<td>Evens: 33.3%</td>
<td>Evens: 28.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Evens: 9.5%</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Evens: 4.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Table 16. “Do I need to learn my ethnic language?” (Dzhargalakh village) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>G1</th>
<th>G2</th>
<th>G3</th>
<th>G4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Evens: 33.3%</td>
<td>Evens: 33.3%</td>
<td>Evens: 33.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
in the Eveno-Bytantaiskii District is strongest. Certainly, the increased Even self-identification and the increased motivation to learn the Even language are interrelated. With state support, there are educational programs for the preservation and development of the languages of indigenous minorities of the North in these villages. Annual events and festivals on the Even language and culture (the traditional gathering of reindeer herders, the recreation of the ritual festival Mjalyn “Awakening,” the autumn ritual festival of preparation for winter, the ritual wedding of Even people) are also held. It should be noted that there has been sustained transmission of the material culture from generation to generation among the Eveno-Tiugasirs, despite the political restrictions of Soviet society. One such tradition is certainly the nomadic way of life of the Evens, where reindeer herding is preserved. School education in the Even language is preserved mostly in the district center of Sakkyryr, and preschool education is preserved in all villages. All these initiatives to preserve the language and culture in the last ten years have produced positive results for the motivation of learning and teaching the Even language. Nevertheless, among G1 respondents in Sakkyryr village there is a lack of motivation to learn the language (among 12.7 per cent), or else they answer “do not know” (4.3 per cent). In Kustur village, 9.5 per cent of respondents are not interested in learning their ethnic language, which, in our opinion, is primarily related to the current trends of globalization and the influence of Internet communication. In Kustur village, the oldest generation (G4) answered negatively 4.3 per cent of the time, which is related to the respondent’s inclination towards the familiar language—the language of upbringing in mixed marriages (Sakha).

According to the responses, the majority of the respondents communicate in Sakha on messaging platforms. Announcements and texts in the newspaper are customarily read in Sakha and Russian; literature is primarily read in Russian. The nature of means of communication (the functioning of messenger platforms and social networks) in the area as a whole depends on whether families have the ability to provide themselves with Wi-Fi. Due to the geographical remoteness from Yakutsk, provision of the entire population of the Eveno-Bytantaiskii ulus with the Internet is difficult. Thus, the Internet works stably only in certain organizations, such as in schools, in the administration, and in the housing and utilities sector.
Discussion

Our study of the linguistic situation of the Even language in the Eveno-Bytantaiskii ulus of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) shows a linguistic shift towards the Sakha language among those who self-identify as Evens.

S. I. Sharina notes that the real language situation is such that more than 70 per cent of children learning indigenous languages do not speak them. The available textbooks do not meet modern requirements, are designed only for minority language speakers, and serve the interests of only a quarter of children. The modern textbooks of the native language for the peoples of the North do not correspond to the actual linguistic situation on the ground. While originally the textbook was merely a tool for teaching literacy in one’s native language (to those who already spoke it), for the past 30 years it has been necessary for textbooks to serve as the primary medium of instruction in the language as a whole. It has become a common phrase among educators that children learn Even, Evenki, or Yukaghir as foreign languages. Yet, Even language textbooks are not commensurate in their methodology with actual foreign language textbooks: they do not teach language as means of dialogue or communication, and they continue to focus only on literacy skills (Sharina 2015).

We can view the Even language in the Eveno-Bytantaiskii National District from two perspectives:

1) As an ethnic language. Full classification of Even language will contribute to universal teaching of the language. It is necessary to process the language materials collected by Maria Egorovna Kolesova, a resident of the village—in particular, the dictionary of the Tiugiasir dialect—and apply them to the revitalization of the Even language.

2) As the language of cultural heritage. According to the opinion of Montrul, we note that some categories of people of the older generation and children of school and preschool age are engaged in maintenance and dissemination of Even as a cultural heritage language through the sharing of folklore within the local creative collectives “Upend’el” and “Ayanessa.” The children’s ethno-folklore ensemble “Ayanessa” was founded in March 1993 by Zinaida Platonovna Nikulina (the head), Tatiana Innokentevna Chichiginarova (the choreographer), and Gennady Alekseevich Zubakin (the accordionist). The role of the ethno-folklore ensemble is huge in the development of the ethnic consciousness of the Eveno-Tiugiasirs. The main work on the creation of ritual performances and dances with Even inflection was done.
by Zinaida Platonovna, who is the daughter of Even writer Platon Lamutsky and grew up in an Even linguistic and cultural environment. The purpose of the ensemble was and is to acquaint the rising generation with the Even culture. Many graduates of this ensemble later begin to study the Even language.

The motivation to restore and learn the language at present also depends purely on certain individuals who are engaged in promoting the preservation of the Even culture—additional education, schools, and clubs play a role here. For example, currently in Sakkyryr village in the ethno-cultural center “Garpan” there is a folk theater named after Egor Gavrilevich Kolesov-Bytantai, where performances are staged according to local legends “Kelbes” (hero of the Even epic) and “Kyys Khadar” (the Rock Girl). One of the enthusiasts of the popularization of Even culture is the poet Mikhail Kolesov, a member of the Russian Union of Writers, winner of the “Poet of the Year—2014” award in Moscow, who writes in Russian and Yakut. A collection of his poems was published in Moscow and in Prague, and will be printed in Canada.

Interest in the study and revival of the material culture of the Evens is manifested in the activities of individual activists, such as Malysheva Daria Vasilievna, a native of the Sakkyryr village, who promotes the material culture of the Evens and recreated the traditional dwelling from natural materials (rovdugi—suede from deer skin, frame and poles of wood, collected according to the traditional method). Daria grew up in a nomadic environment and passed on Even traditions and broadcasts to the younger generation.

We believe that there is still hope for language revitalization because “speakers are the single greatest resource a language has; an honest assessment of speakers is key to language revitalization” (Grenoble 2013: 797). As part of the activities of the international research laboratory “Linguistic Ecology of the Arctic” of the M. K. Ammosov North-Eastern Federal University, we recommend development of an ulus program and concept for the revival and development of the Even language and culture, intended to become a guideline and organizational basis for solving the problem of preserving, strengthening, developing, and spreading the Even language and culture in the Eveno-Bytantai ulus of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia).

For the revival and development of the Even language and culture, the following should be proposed to the administration of the ulus (district): support for young professionals (teachers, educators, workers of cultural institutions) in the socio-economic plan; provision of housing and improvement of living conditions, in order to raise the prestige
of teachers and specialists in the native languages and cultures of the indigenous peoples of the North and the Arctic of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia); procurement of federal funding in the form of a supplement to their salaries (a salary increase of 50 per cent) to support teachers and young specialists in the Even language in the district.

Education has traditionally been a significant factor in the preservation and development of native languages. The field of teaching the Even language has a number of issues that need to be addressed immediately. It is necessary to update the content and, accordingly, the educational and methodological support for teaching the Even language in general educational institutions based on new scientific approaches and educational technologies. There is no legal framework that regulates uniform requirements for the volume and content of studying the native language and subjects of regional studies for all levels of education. It is necessary to create a system of continuous teaching of native languages in educational institutions (from kindergarten onward) based on continuity and taking into account the age characteristics of students. These factors should be taken into account when developing textbooks, educational materials, and teaching aids. Creating uniform approaches and standards will allow the formation of criteria for evaluating the developed teaching aids and their implementation.

According to Grenoble and Whaley, when endangered local languages are introduced into a school setting, they are something of a “foreign” language (Grenoble and Whaley 2006: 56–57). At the same time, the responsibility for transmitting the language to the younger generation is imposed on the “educated” parent, that is, “it requires a critical mass of people within a community ... who create domains for language usage.” (Grenoble and Whaley 2006: 57). When developing textbooks on the Even language, we propose a methodology for teaching Russian as a foreign language “… from the position of a communicative-activity approach, with a special place given to the importance of studying vocabulary” (Zhukova 2020: 74). It is also necessary to pay attention to the socio-cultural component, since the most important prerequisite is taking into account the native language of students.

One of the urgent issues in this area is the problem of training and retraining of specialists who own various educational technologies, and developing methods of teaching native languages to persons who do not speak them. The lack of demand for native languages in society has led to a reduction in the flow of applicants who want to enter educational institutions specializing in the field of methods of teach-
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It is also important to organize and conduct “language nests” for language revitalization. The main task of the “language nest” method is to preserve a language that is in critical condition, mainly the language of a national minority. This method is used in a situation where the transmission of a language in the family circle from parents to the next generation is not possible (Mandzhieva 2021). The Maori example has become a role model for many other linguistic communities in various parts of the world, where the “language nest” has been borrowed as a means of reviving endangered minority languages. To date, “language nests” have been created among the indigenous population of the United States, in Hawaii, in Ireland, and among others, and in all of these cases, the activity of “nests” has been shown to be extremely effective in reviving the language in comparison with traditional extracurricular language teaching (Grenoble and Whaley 2006: 50).

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Antonina Afanasievna Vinokurova (ORCID: 0000-0003-0838-2958) is a Candidate of Philology and Senior Researcher in the Arctic Linguistic Ecology Lab, and is Head of the Department of Northern Philology at the M. K. Ammosov North-Eastern Federal University, Yakutsk, Russia. Her scientific interests are in the field of languages, folklore, and literature of the peoples of the North, food culture, and linguistic ecology. She is author of 40 articles in journals about the literary process of Even literature, vocabulary of the Even language, and food culture, as well as a monograph on the poetics of Even poetry, and is co-author of a monograph on the food culture of northern peoples. E-mail: antonina-vinokurova@bk.ru.
Irena Semenovna Khokholova (ORCID: 0000-0003-0066-7537) is a Candidate of Philology and Senior Researcher in the Arctic Linguistic Ecology Lab, and an Associate Professor at the Institute of Modern Languages and Regional Studies of the M. K. Ammosov North-Eastern Federal University, Yakutsk, Russia. Her research interests include psycholinguistics, text perception, intercultural communication, and cultural landscape. She is author of 40 articles in journals about problems of worldview of the Sakha and Russian people; cross-cultural research on text perception; cultural landscape and Arctic urban studies; and political, ethnic, and civic identity of the population of the cities of Yakutia. She is co-author of one monograph on problems of translation specifics from Sakha to Russian and intercultural communication. E-mail: iskhokholova@mail.ru.

Boris Yakovlevich Osipov (ORCID: 0000-0003-1171-268X) is a graduate student at Amur State University (Blagoveshchensk), a Junior Researcher in the Arctic Linguistic Ecology Lab, and a Member of the Department of Northern Philology at the Institute for Humanities Research and Indigenous Studies of the North, Siberian Division of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Yakutsk). Osipov specializes in experimental phonology, the Even language, Tungusic languages, and the preservation and revitalization of minority languages. E-mail: b_osipov@rambler.ru.

Stepan Stepanovich Pavlov (ORCID: 0000-0002-0800-8846) is a Junior Researcher in the Arctic Linguistic Ecology Lab at the M. K. Ammosov North-Eastern Federal University in Yakutsk. His research interests involve arctic studies, arctic discourse, linguistics, and sociolinguistics. E-mail: Iakutich13@mail.ru.

Yana Egorovna Tokhtobina (ORCID: 0000-000-02232-5752) is a Researcher in the Arctic Linguistic Ecology Lab at the M. K. Ammosov North-Eastern Federal University in Yakutsk. Her research interests include dialects of the Yakut language, lexicology, indigenous language, sociological linguistics, and ethnolinguistics. E-mail: namina-s@mail.ru.

Vilyuyana Semenovna Platonova (ORCID: 0000-0002-8390-4544) is a Junior Researcher in the Arctic Linguistic Ecology Lab at the M. K. Ammosov North-Eastern Federal University in Yakutsk, Russia. Her research interests include lexicology, semantics, sociolinguistics, ethnolinguistics. E-mail: vilyuyana_plat@mail.ru.
Notes


2. Severely endangered status means the language is spoken only by grandparents and older generations; while the parental generation may understand it, they do not speak it to children or amongst themselves.

3. Vulnerable status means that most children speak the language, but it may be restricted to certain domains (e.g., home).

4. In 1992, on the basis of Article 46 of the Constitution of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), the Yakut language, along with Russian, received official status as the state language of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia).


7. This geographic region has always been and remains a heterogeneous one in terms of ethnic composition.

8. The Tugocher (Tumucher, Tiugiasir) clan was known both among the Evenki and the Evens. Prior to the arrival of Russians in the area, the Tugocher Evens inhabited the headwaters of the Okhota River, where they were first observed by I. Moskvitin. In 1782, they consisted of three administrative clans: Tiugiasirskii (location unspecified), with 126 men, Tiugiasirskii near the Verkhoianskii winter hut with 85 men, and Tiugiasirskii near Zashiversk with 24 men.

9. This technique requires a creative approach by the researcher and mindfulness of the psychological impact on the interlocutor because the result—trust, openness, and sincerity in the respondent’s answers—depends on how the interview is conducted.

10. The research was carried out under grant No. 075-15-2021-616 for the project “Preservation of Linguistic and Cultural Diversity and Sustainable Development of the Arctic and Subarctic of the Russian Federation.”

11. Yakutsk State University was reorganized into the North-Eastern Federal University in 2010.

12. Sebian-Kiuel’ used to be a part of the Sakkyryrskii District.

13. Both respondents are native speakers of the Even language from the village of Sebian-Kiuel’.
References


Appendix: Linguistic Background Questionnaire

Part 1: General information

About myself:
When were you born?
Gender:
Place of birth:
Your nationality:
Clan affiliation:
Where do you live?
Where did you grow up?
Where did you live before school? If in the tundra, in the taiga, near which rivers/slopes?
Education (college, university, n/a)
Where did you study?

Your parents:

Mother
1. Your mother’s year of birth
2. Place of birth of the mother
3. Mother’s nationality
4. Did your mother go to school?
5. If yes, which one?
6. What languages were taught?
7. What language does/did your mother speak to you?

Father
8. Father’s year of birth
9. Place of birth of the father
10. Did the father go to school?
11. If yes, which one?
12. What languages were taught?
13. What language does/did your father speak to you in?

Both
14. What language do parents speak/speak among themselves?
15. What other languages does/did your mother speak? With whom?
16. What other languages does/did your father speak?
17. What languages did your mother passively know (understand but not speak)? How do you know this—try to remember a specific scenario.
18. What languages did your father passively know (understand but not speak)? How do you know this—try to remember a specific scenario.

Part 2: Linguistic data

1. Which language (or languages) do you speak fluently? Please specify all these languages (if possible, also specify your dialect).
2. Approximately at what age did you start learning these languages? Who taught you? (For example: a family member, a teacher at school, a TV program, a movie, the Internet, etc.)
3. Please indicate any languages that you once knew but now use very little or not at all.
4. What language (or languages) do you speak at home? With whom? If you speak more than one language, please indicate how often you speak each of these languages:
   Labels: 1 = most often; 2 = often; 3 = sometimes; 4 = rarely
5. What language (or languages) do you speak outside the home (e.g., at work, in the store, at school, at the doctor’s office)? Who do you speak these languages with? If you indicated more than one language, please indicate how often you speak each language.
   Labels: 1 = most often; 2 = often; 3 = sometimes; 4 = rarely
**Part 3: Language use and the setting of indigenous languages**

6. What language (which languages) do you consider to be the language of your ancestors? Why?

7. Who do you speak your mother tongue with? Is it the language of your ancestors?

8. Which of your relatives speaks your ancestral language(s) today?

In what contexts do you hear, see, or speak the ancestral language(s)?

| Languages: (1) ___________________ (2) ___________________ (3) ___________________ |
|---|---|---|
| □️ □️ □️ music | □️ □️ □️ podcasts | □️ □️ □️ doing business | others: (give a list) |
| □️ □️ □️ radio | □️ □️ □️ Facebook, Instagram, etc. | □️ □️ □️ public / government services | □️ □️ □️ computer games |
| □️ □️ □️ television | □️ □️ □️ in conversation with the older generation | □️ □️ □️ ceremonial or ritual, ceremonial functions | □️ □️ □️ |
| □️ □️ □️ websites | □️ □️ □️ in conversation with peers | □️ □️ □️ in school classes | □️ □️ □️ |
| □️ □️ □️ SMS | □️ □️ □️ on public signs | □️ □️ □️ in other contexts at school | □️ □️ □️ |

9. Do you have access to language resources for your ethnic/ancestral language (e.g., communication with elderly native speakers, courses, dictionaries, textbooks, etc.)?

□️ □️ □️ yes  □️ □️ □️ no
Part 4: Language knowledge and skills

10. In what spheres are you more comfortable using your native language(s)? Please answer the questions below which relate to the degree of proficiency in spoken and written language, i.e., in speaking, understanding (spoken), reading, and writing.

a. In conversation □1 □2 □3

   and more specifically:

   - □1 □2 □3 I can communicate with different people without difficulty.
   - □1 □2 □3 I can communicate with different people, but sometimes I have difficulty.

Comments:

b. Reading □1 □2 □3

   and more specifically:

   - □1 □2 □3 I can read any text, no problem.
   - □1 □2 □3 I read well, but cannot read all texts without difficulty.

Comments:

c. Writing □1 □2 □3

   and more specifically:

   - □1 □2 □3 I write different types of texts, using different styles.
   - □1 □2 □3 I write with difficulty.

Comments:
Part 5: Ideas for the future

11. Are you trying to develop your level of knowledge of your native language(s)?
   □ 1 □ 2 □ 3 yes □ 1 □ 2 □ 3 no

12. Which learning conditions and methods (e.g., courses, seminars, home/family practice) and learning/learning environment (e.g., at school, at home, at work, during traditional activities) would improve language learning? Please specify if you think that the best methods differ from language to language.

13. What would be the ideal situation for your language or languages (e.g., for everyone to speak the language fluently, for people to be able to learn the language if they wish, for official documents to be translated, for the language to be represented on bilingual signs, posters, etc.)? Please clarify if the situation is different for each language.

14. What are the most important goals in terms of language in your community (e.g., more hours in school for learning, more services in your language(s), radio or TV programs in your language, etc.)? Please clarify if the situation is different for each language.

15. What is the best way to communicate the results of this survey to your community?
   □ on the radio □ hand over a paper copy of the report
   □ on the website □ present at a community meeting