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The Vitality of Evenki and the Influence of Language Policy from the Early Soviet Union Until Today

Roberta Schiralli

S1906836

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Supervisor: Dr. E.L. Stapert

Abstract

Since the early days of the Soviet Union, the Evenks have been subject to interventionist linguistic legislation affecting the status of their language. Following a diachronic-descriptive approach, this work provides a comprehensive overview on the vitality of Evenki in relation to the linguistic policies applied from the early Soviet period until today. To assess the vitality of this language, I take into account the nine factors established by the UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages in 2003, examining them in light of the linguistic policies implemented from the early Soviet period until today.

Key Words: Evenki- language policy- language vitality

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Introduction

The Evenks represent one of the most numerous and widespread ethnic groups living in northern Siberia, China, and Mongolia. Some groups are settled in the northeast of China, on the Khingan spurs in northern Manchuria, in the Mongolian Republic, on the Iro River, and in the area surrounding Lake Buir-Nur. Nonetheless, the great majority is currently settled in Siberia, for a total of 38, 400 people, as the 2010 Russian census estimated (Haak 2016, 3).

Linguistically, Evenki ‘is one of the eight Tungusic languages spoken in Siberia and the Far East of Asiatic Russia [and it] belongs to the Northern Tungusic subgroup’ (Nedjalkov 1997, xix). Until the 20th century, it was known as *Tungus* or *Orochen*. Since the formation of the Soviet Union, the Evenks, as well as all the other minority groups, were subject to different linguistic measures which impacted the status of the language. Like Imperial Russia before it, the new USSR was multiethnic and multilingual. Thus, the new government had the urge to adopt legislative measures to regulate the usage of local languages. The early Soviet period includes the reforms under Lenin and Stalin at the beginning of his rule, which were oriented toward supporting the equality and the sovereignty of linguistic minorities settled in the Union. On the contrary, the policies applied from the late 1930s until the Brezhnev era, were finalised to overcome the ethnic and linguistic diversity, prioritising Russian culture and language over non-Russian ones. From *perestroika* until today, the State changed its attitude towards linguistic minorities, aiming to protect them within the territories of the former Soviet Union.

In the following discussion, I investigate how the language policies applied from the early Soviet period until today affected the vitality of Evenki. For my purpose, I identified three main stages describing the legislative measures applied in this time frame: the early Soviet Union, from the late 1930s to the Brezhnev era, and from the *perestroika* years until today. My hypothesis is that the linguistic policies applied in these three time periods affected the vitality of Evenki. In my research, I did not involve the status of this language in Imperial Russia. Briefly, however, under the Tsarist rule, the indigenous groups were subject to aggressive measures to prioritise Russian language and culture. At that time, Evenki was not a literary language yet, so the sources describing exactly the status of the language in this period are quite limited. Nonetheless, it seems that Russian was used as the communication language only among the traders or between a dominant group and subdued people (Grenoble and Whaley 1999, 377), while Evenki was still practiced and spoken by the indigenous people, especially in the private domain. According to Sivtseva, in 1897,

there were 64,500 Evenks in Russia and 34,471 of them spoke Evenki as first language (The Peoples of the Red Book in Sivtseva 2015, 26).

In order to find support for my hypothesis, I take into account the nine factors established by the UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages. In 2003, UNESCO delegated a group of linguists to formulate ‘a framework for determining the vitality of a language in order to assist in policy development, identification of needs and appropriate safeguarding measures’ (UNESCO Endangered Languages: A Methodology for Assessing Language Vitality and Endangerment 2017). The linguists of the Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages elaborated the document *Language Vitality and Endangerment* which establishes the following factors to evaluate the status of a community’s language: intergenerational language transmission, absolute number of speakers, proportion of speakers within the total population, trends in existing language domains, response to new domains and media, materials for language education and literacy, governmental and institutional language policies, community members’ attitudes toward their own language, and amount and quality of documentation (UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment 2003, 7-13-14-16). Following a diachronic-descriptive approach, I will discuss each of these factors in light of the linguistic policies applied to the Evenks in the early Communist period, from the late 1930s to the Brezhnev era, and from *perestroika* until today. In this way, I aim to show how these legislative measures influenced the vitality of Evenki.

The range of sources I have used is quite diverse. I have taken into account the statistical data reported by Ethnologue, the SIL International non-profit organization, and the UNESCO Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger. I found also extremely useful the field research regarding the Evenks, as most of them include authentic interviews and personal experiences. Equally important were some websites, such as the Interethnic Dialogue Platform-Evenki¹, the online Evenki library *Evenkiteka*², and the Official Site of LSG Organs of the Evenk Municipal District,³ which were useful for collecting information on the existing documentation in Evenki and the current legislative measures.

The main body of the discussion is structured in four main sections. In the first one, I present the Evenks, their geographic distribution, origins, economy, and language. Then, I explain the concepts of ‘language policy’ and ‘language vitality,’ presenting several

¹ Межнациональная Диалоговая Площадка-Эвенки (transliterated *Mezhnatsional’naia Dialogovaia Ploshadka-Ėvenki*)

² Эвенкитека — Эвенкийская Библиотека (transliterated *Ėvenkiteka-Ėvenkiiskaia Biblioteka*)

³ Официальный Сайт Органов МСУ Эвенкийского Муниципального Района (transliterated *Ofitsial’nyi Saĭt Organov MSU Ėvenkiiskovo Munitsipal’novo Raiona*)

definitions provided by other scholars on these topics. In the third part, I examine in detail the language policies applied to the Evenks from Lenin's rule until today. Then, I discuss the nine UNESCO factors to investigate the vitality of Evenki in the mentioned time periods.

Literature Review

The effects that linguistic policies have on languages themselves have been treated under different perspectives. Some scholars examine in depth the link between language policy and language revitalisation. Grenoble and Whaley, in the publication *Saving Languages: An Introduction to Language Revitalization*, address the main issues in saving endangered languages, among which language policy is mentioned. According to them, language policies shape patterns of language use in many spheres, like courts, schools, and so on. Thus, they have a direct influence on the vitality of local languages and they can help or prevent their revitalisation. Clearly, their impact is very hard to predict, since the policies established at a regional and national level are quite often in conflict and many countries do not have a coherent language policy. This happens 'because language is involved in so many different aspects of society that a policy not specifically designed with local languages in mind can have a major impact on their usage' (Grenoble and Whaley 2006, 26). In order to develop my study on Evenki, I referred exactly to Grenoble and Whaley's assumption, according to which linguistic policies can either help or damage the status of languages.

Among the studies specifically related to Evenki, there is *Language Policy and the Loss of Tungusic Languages* by Grenoble and Whaley. In this contrastive analysis, the authors compare the social policies implemented in the Soviet Union and in the Republic of China, highlighting the effects they had on the Siberian Evenki and the Oroquen. In both cases, the social policies of these countries were related to the 'principle of territorial autonomy, where an ethnic group is given a degree of autonomy at certain levels in the administrative hierarchy' (Grenoble and Whaley 1999, 373). In this paper, they argue in what ways these policies have contributed to Evenki and Oroquen endangerment.

The research conducted by Sivtseva, *The Role of the New Evenkiness in the Evenki Language Revitalization: The Case of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia)*, specifically examines the factors motivating the loss of Evenki, the indigenous identity in the Soviet Union and Russia, and 'the role of the new Evenkiness in the Evenki language revival' (Sivtseva 2015, iv). The part I was interested in explores the Soviet linguistic policy and the impact it had on Evenki at the beginning of Stalin's rule.

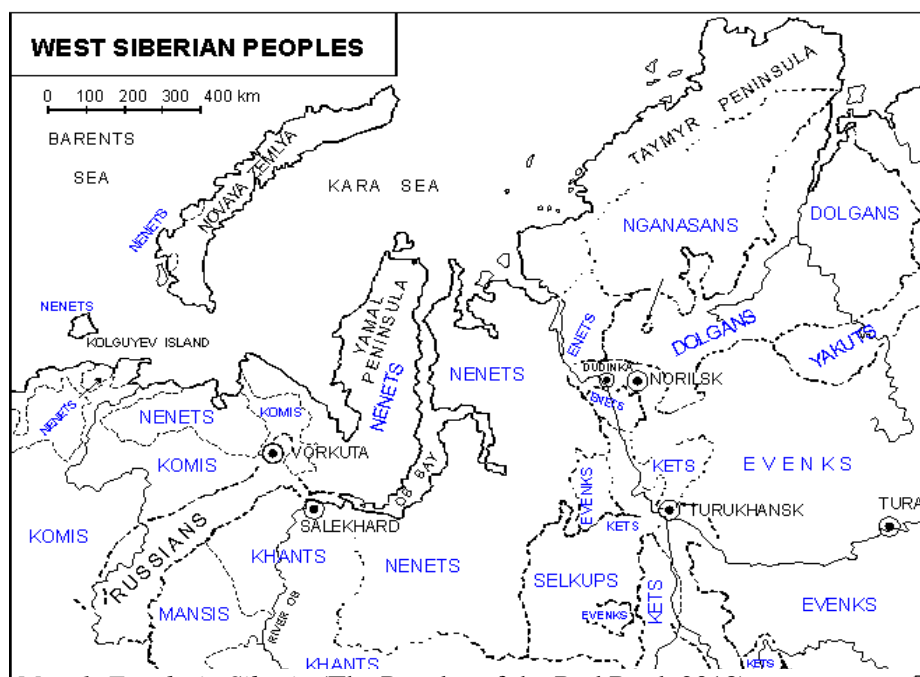
Similarly, the research *What Language Do Real Evenki Speak?* by Mamontova examines discussions on language maintenance among the Evenks settled in Krasnoyarsk Krai. Focusing attention on the model of nomadic preschools in this region, she analyses to what extent these institutions might contribute to the language maintenance. I took into account this work as it includes interesting interviews of indigenous Evenks, providing data consistent with my research. In the next section, I start my discussion with an overview of this minority group.

1. Siberian Evenks

1.1 Geographical Distribution

Evenki is the largest of the Tungusic languages spoken in Siberia and it belongs to the Northwestern branch of Manchu-Tungus. The ethnic population is settled in Siberia, as well as in China and Mongolia, constituting overall a population of 70,000 people (Sivtseva 2015, 22). Some groups live in the northeast of China, on the Khingan spurs, which corresponds to northern Manchuria, in the Mongolian Republic, on the Iro River, and in the area surrounding Lake Buir-Nur (Levin and Potapov 1964, 620). According to the 2010 census, almost 30,875 Evenks, mostly Solons and Khamnigans, live in China (Wikipedia 2018). Nowadays, 88.8% of Chinese Evenks are settled in the Hulunbuir region situated in the northern part of Inner Mongolia province. Around 3,000 Evenks live in the Heilongjiang province, located in the northeast part of China (Altaic Wiki 2018).

However, nowadays the great majority of Evenks live in northern Siberia, precisely



Map 1. Evenks in Siberia (The Peoples of the Red Book 2018)

38,400 people according to the 2010 census (Haak 2016, 3). Map 1 shows the position of this group in Siberia. They occupy the territory 'from the River Ob in the west to the Okhotsk Sea in the east, and from the Arctic Ocean in

the north to Manchuria and Sakhalin in the south' (The Peoples of the Red Book 2018). Administratively, the Evenks are located in the Oblasts of Tyumenskaya and Tomskaya, Krasnoyarsk Krai, in the Oblasts of Irkutskaya, Chitinskaya, and Amurskaya, in Buryat and Yakutia Republics, in Khabarovsk Krai, and in the Sakhalin region (Levin and Potapov 1964, 620). The Evenks' autonomous and national territory is now part of the Krasnoyarsk

District, 'where 3,200 of the 30,000 Evenks live. Close to 12,000 Evenks live in Yakutia'. (The Peoples of the Red Book 2018).

1.2 Origins of Siberian Evenks

The Evenks were previously designated under the name of 'Tungus,' a denomination initially attributed by Yakuts and Siberian Tatars in the 17th century; then, it became very common among Russians in the following decades. Although the Evenks had several ways to identify themselves, the most widespread one was *Even*, *Evenk*⁴ which became the official designation of this ethnic group in 1931; before then, they used to define themselves as *Tungus* (Interethnic Dialogue Platform-Evenki 2014-2016)⁵. Also among the neighbouring groups, they were known by different names: the Chinese called them 'Ki-Ling, Ch'i-ling. In Chinese literary sources we find also the name *O-lun-ch'un*, i.e., 'Orochen' (Levin and Potapov 1964, 621); by the Manchus they were called *Oronchun*, *Orochen*, *Orochan* or *Uroncho*; among the Nivkhi, they were known as *Kili*; and among the Nanays, they were known as *Kilen*.

Explaining the origin of Evenks and Evens, Pakendorf mentions two divergent hypotheses (Pakendorf 2007, 15). Vasilevič explains that the origins of Tungus-Manchu groups are connected to the Neolithic hunters who settled to the south of Lake Baikal. At the end of the first millennium BC, the ancestors of the Manchu moved to the Amur-Ussuri region separating themselves from this ancestral group, while the Amur and Northern Tungusic groups' ancestors moved to the north nearby Lake Baikal where, during the Neolithic, they came into contact with other groups (Pakendorf 2007, 15). In the first millennium AD, with the arrival of Turkic groups in the area surrounding Lake Baikal, the ancestors of the Northern Tungus (Evenks and Evens) splitted off into a western group and an eastern one; this led to the formation of Evenks and Evens as separate communities.

A different interpretation holds that the Tungus-Manchu people's ancestors had their origins in Manchuria, as here the presence of the branches of Tungusic language has been observed (Janhunen in Pakendorf 2007, 15). According to Janhunen, the Northern Tungusic groups took their origins on the Middle Amur. Considering the Evenki dialectical features, it is also possible that the northern migration of the Evenks and Evens occurred in two waves

⁴ Nowadays, *Even* indicates a different Siberian minority living in the Magadan Oblast and Kamchatka Krai. Some communities are also settled in northern parts of Sakha, east of the Lena River (Wikipedia 2018).

⁵ Russian source Межнациональная Диалоговая Площадка-Эвенки (Mezhnatsional'naia Dialogovaia Ploshadka-Ėvenki) <http://xn--80agbqqs.xn--80asehdb/wiki/evenki>

(Janhunen in Pakendorf 2007, 15). The first one led to the formation of the Cisbaikalian Evenks and the Evens, while from the other one, the Transbaikalian Evenks took their origins. The Evenks and Evens' ancestors were located 'between the upper reaches of the Verxnjaja Angara and Olëkma rivers [...]where a group of reindeer-herders called *Uvan*' are mentioned in chronicles of the 5th to 7th century AD' (Tugolukov in Pakendorf 2007, 16). Then, the Evenks and Evens' ancestors further expanded to the north in the 12th-13th century. The Northern Tungusic communities spread in three different waves over the area where they are currently settled; in the first one, 'they settled on the middle reaches of the Lena and the Aldan river before the arrival of the Sakha ancestors in the 13th century' (Pakendorf 2007, 16); in the second one, under the pressure of the Turkic-speaking groups, they spread up to the Aldan. Then, with the Sakha expansion, they moved to further pastoralist areas.

The first contacts between Evenks and Russians occurred in the 17th century, when the Cossacks moved to the Yenisei and after through the Upper Tunguska. Then, they conquered the area of the Mangazeya, Turukhan, and the Taz Rivers in northwestern Siberia and the right bank of the Yenisei where the Evenks were settled at that time. When the Russian occupation began, Evenks became subject to taxation (The Peoples of the Red Book 2018). In order to collect the tributes in furs, the Tsarist government made use of the tribal organization of these people: 'hostages (amanats) were taken from the "finest" people in each clan. To pay their tax, the Evenks went to the fortress or the winter camp-where the collectors and hostages were kept' (Levin and Potapov 1964, 624). Despite the aggressive and repressive attitude of the Tsarist authorities, the Evenks were one of those Siberian groups looking with curiosity at the Russian culture. They showed particular interest in exchanging furs for iron, copper, pots, axes, clothes, and knives.

It was the 19th century when the relations between Russians and Evenks became closer. One of the means adopted by the Tsarist authorities to reinforce Russian influence was the imposition of the Christian religion on this group, as well as on all the other Siberian peoples. The conversion among the Evenks started already in the 17th century, although only in the 18th were the missionaries active in most of the regions inhabited by these groups. However, since conversion to the Orthodoxy was limited only to the main rituals like baptism and communion, the previous religious beliefs, mainly shamanism, survived up until the 20th century.

In the early Soviet period, the government implemented the organization 'on a territorial basis [...], and national village councils, districts, and territories were formed' (The Peoples of the Red Book 2018). Under Stalin, the collectivisation started, transforming the nomadic nature of these peoples into sedentary practices and completely subverting their

distribution and their social structure. This new territorial organization strongly affected this group, contributing to the loss of local traditions and habits.

1.3 Evenk Economy

Most areas inhabited by Evenks are characterised by taiga forests, except for those between the Khatanga and Yenisei in the extreme North and the rivers Taz and Turukhan in the North-West. The fauna here is quite diverse and it is mainly characterised by squirrels, elk, bears, foxes, and especially reindeer, which are fundamental for the daily subsistence of this population. For those groups living in the southern area of Lake Yessey, fishing was considered the main activity of their economy. Reindeer breeding was also fundamental, as the ‘domesticated reindeer were the most important draught and riding animals, and success in hunting was dependent on the existence of reindeer in a family’ (The Peoples of the Red Book). Before collectivisation started, this kind of economy ensured the Evenks a nomadic way of life characterised by constant migration and the ‘full participation of all family members in livelihood. Evenki lived in small groups of families moving around herding pastures, where rare contacts with other ethnic groups occurred’ (Brian in Sivtseva 2015, 22). The social structure was based on kinship and clan division.

In the 1930s, on the basis of the collectivist ideology, the Soviet government reorganised the production in the northern territories, forcing these groups to become sedentary. This new system led the Evenks- and all the other indigenous populations- to settle, to cease private reindeer breeding and give their animals to the collective farms, and to regulate their hunting within a certain amount established by the authority. It goes without saying that the indigenous traditional way of life was remarkably threatened by the new policy. As mentioned above, the Evenks used to live in extended families and base their subsistence on hunting and fishing; during the collectivisation, they had to adapt to ‘communal herding where former values of the traditional way of life had little significance for a settled style of living and collectivization’ (Sivtseva 2015, 33).

1.4 Evenki Language

Until the 20th century, Evenki was known as *Tungus* or *Orochen*. Nowadays, it is spoken in regions showing with high levels of multilingualism. Indeed, they ‘come into contact with Russian, Buryat, and Yakut, and each of these languages has had an impact on the Evenki

language’ (Bulatova and Grenoble 1999, 3). Its basic vocabulary, indeed, shows several borrowings from different languages. For instance, the Evenks settled in the surrounding of Lake Baikal, ‘where they have been mixed with the Buryats for a long time, show later lexical borrowings also from the latter’ (Levin and Potapov 1964, 622).

Evenki is characterised by deep dialectal variation. There are three different branches, the Manchu, the Amur Tungusic, and the Northern Tungusic one, and the connection among them was already recognised in the 18th century (Atkine 1997, 111). In 1949, Vera I. Cincius further clarified the classification of the Northern Tungus, dividing it into Even and Evenki which today are two different linguistic minorities. Regarding the Evenki language, she identified the Northern, the Eastern, the Southern, the Negidal, and the Solon dialects (Grenoble, Li, Whaley in Haak 2016, 10).

The first works on Evenki date back to the 19th century. One of the most important is the descriptive grammar by Castrén, which is still considered the starting point of modern Tungusology. However, even in the 18th century, short lists of Evenki phrases and words were noted down by European scholars, such as Witsen, Masserschmidt, and Strahlenberg (Atkine 1997, 111). The first written traces of standard Evenki date back to the 1930s, when novels, poems, translations from Russian into the indigenous language and vice-versa, school textbooks, dictionaries, grammar books, and primers started circulating. In 1930, Evenki standard language was elaborated based on the Latin script. In 1933-1934, it was officially ‘introduced into primary schools in the Evenk National Territory’ (The Peoples of the Red Book 2018). Having outlined the main characteristics of the Evenks, in the next chapter, I clarify in depth the concepts of language policy and language vitality.

2. Language Policy and Language Vitality

2.1 Defining Language Policy

The study of language policy has captured the attention of many scholars in the last five decades, with growing interest in the last twenty years. However, there is still an ongoing debate to define precisely the aim, the nature, the terminology, and the exact definition of this field. According to Kaplan and Baldauf, ‘a language policy represents the laws, regulations, rules, practices, or body of ideas intended to achieve a planned language change in a society, group, or system’(Kaplan and Baldauf in Sanden 2015, 1098). All these legislative acts taken by the government are finalised ‘to (a) determine how languages are used in public contexts, (b) cultivate language skills needed to meet national priorities, or (c) establish the rights of individuals or groups to learn, use, and maintain languages’ (Fodde in Haak 2016, 16).

One of the most cited definitions of language policy is provided by Spolsky. According to him, this is a generic concept consisting of three components: language practices, language beliefs, and language management decisions. In the context of a multilingual community, ‘the language practices of the community members will refer to the habitual patterns associated with their linguistic repertoire, i.e. what languages they tend to speak in what situations’ (Sanden 2015, 1098). Language beliefs, also known as ideologies, indicate the values attributed to each language. Then, language management conceptualises ‘observable efforts made by someone or some group that either has or claims authority to control the language use of others in the community (Spolsky in Sanden 2015, 1098). Spolsky also highlights that language policy initiatives are usually applied to pursue non-linguistic goals. In most cases, the linguistic issues are directly connected to the community’s cultural, religious, economic, political matters.

Although all these conceptualisations are equally acceptable and exhaustive, the definition provided by Grenoble and Whaley provides a good starting point for my research. They stress that language policies shape patterns of language use in the schools, the government offices, the courts, and so on (Grenoble and Whaley 2006, 26). Thus, they directly influence the vitality of local languages and their chances -or, eventually, the lack of- for maintenance and revitalisation. Clearly, their impact cannot be fully predicted, as policies established at the regional and national levels are often in conflict, and many states do not always follow a coherent and uniform language policy. ‘This is because language is involved in so many different aspects of society that a policy not specifically designed with

local languages in mind can have a major impact on their usage’ (Grenoble and Whaley 2006, 26). In most cases, this policy works better for national languages characterising a nation state, which work as the dominant ones. The minority ones, on the contrary, are quite often marginalised. In this regard, UNESCO established six different forms of dealing with minority languages: equal support, differentiated support, passive assimilation, active assimilation, forced assimilation, and prohibition (Grenoble and Whaley 2006, 12). Equal support occurs when ‘all languages are protected by law, and the government encourages the maintenance of all languages by implementing explicit policies’ (UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment 2003, 13). The differentiated support is actually the most common one and it occurs when ‘“non-dominant languages” are protected by governmental policies but are not used in all the domains where the “dominant” or official language(s) are found’. Instead, the local languages are more often used in private domains’ (Grenoble and Whaley 2006, 12). In the case of passive assimilation, there is neither a policy guiding the minority groups’ assimilation nor a policy of support; thus, the communication language is the dominant one. Then, active assimilation, forced assimilation, and prohibition ‘differ in terms of degree of governmental intervention to coerce people to give up their local language in favor of the approved official language’ (Grenoble and Whaley 2006, 12).

Although linguistic policy is definitely one of the most influential ones, there are several other factors affecting the vitality of minority languages, such as education policies, federal support, regional autonomy, and human and financial resources. For my purpose, I take into account the relation between language policy and language vitality.

2.2 Assessing Language Vitality

Language vitality indicates to what extent ‘the language is used as a means of communication in various social contexts for specific purposes’ (SIL Language Assessment Language Vitality 2018). It is a fundamental feature to establish the urgency for languages’ documentation and it may influence further measures for the linguistic revitalisation. A language in danger has to be documented as soon as possible and the deeper the documentation is, the easier the revitalisation process will be for the speakers’ community. Assessing linguistic vitality is a quite complex matter, considering the large number of features involved.

Linguists’ interest in this subject has considerably increased in the last two decades and several approaches have been adopted to study language vitality. One of the most

comprehensive studies was elaborated by the linguists of the UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages. Working together, they created the document *Languages Vitality and Endangerment* in 2003 where they listed nine factors to assess language vitality. These are the following:

Factor 1: Intergenerational language transmission

Factor 2: Absolute number of speakers

Factor 3: Proportion of speakers within the total population

Factor 4: Trends in existing language domains

Factor 5: Response to new domains and media

Factor 6: Materials for language education and literacy

Factor 7: Governmental and institutional language policies, including official status and use

Factor 8: Community members' attitudes toward their own language

Factor 9: Amount and quality of documentation

The intergenerational transmission is one of the fundamental prerequisites for language maintenance and usage over the course of time (UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment 2003, 7). This factor is connected to the number of speakers practicing it, which is the second UNESCO aspect. The higher the linguistic generational transmission is, the higher the number of speakers is. Although it is very hard to provide a valid interpretation of the absolute number of people using the language, it is also true that a small group of speakers is more at risk than a larger one. A smaller community is indeed more vulnerable to decimation, because of diseases, warfare, natural disasters, or it could also blend into a neighboring group, being deprived of its culture and language (Grenoble and Whaley 2006, 5). The number of speakers in relation to the total population of a group is also very significant, where 'group' has to be intended as the regional, national, religious, or ethnic one with which the speakers identify themselves. The fourth factor, trends in existing language domains, clarifies 'where, with whom, and the range of topics for which a language is used [...]' (UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment 2003, 9). The response to new domains and media allows one to see if the community's language is used in broadcast media, social platforms, but also in schools, and new work environments. The sixth factor concerns the education material and literacy through which language can be maintained. Education *in* the language is clearly essential to keep it alive and to encourage its transmission within the community. There are some groups mainly maintaining oral traditions and some others in which literacy is essential, so the language is kept alive through

written documentation. The seventh aspect concerns the policies adopted by governments and institutions towards the dominant and the minority languages. It involves all the initiatives and legislative measures to facilitate or to limit the linguistic development. Then, the attitude of the speakers is another fundamental criterion. It can be either positive or negative and it differently affects the linguistic vitality. If it is positive, then the language is perceived as the bearer of community's identity, 'if members view their language as hindrance to economic mobility and integration into mainstream society, they may develop negative attitudes toward their language' (UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment 2003, 14). The last aspect, the amount and the quality of documentation, concerns the type of language materials, like written texts and audiovisual recordings.

All these factors depend one from the other, thus one single factor cannot be used to assess the linguistic vitality. For instance, the language usage in new and existing domains is closely connected to the community attitudes and to the governmental policies (Grenoble and Whaley 2006, 4). However, when the language appears low in relation to a specific factor, it does not mean that this is also true for other factors. A small number of speakers in a large community does not necessarily indicate a low level of vitality, if the language is employed in many domains, if an appropriate education policy is implemented, and if the community's attitude towards it is particularly positive (Grenoble and Whaley 2006, 4).

For each aspect, UNESCO has established six grades called 'grades of endangerment' or simply 'grades.' They range from 0 to 5 and to each number corresponds a specific definition allowing for the assessment of the language status in relation to each factor. For instance, in the case of the intergenerational transmission of language, the following ranks have been settled. If the grade is 5, that means that the language is still transferred from generation to generation; if it is equal to 0, it means that the language is not transmitted at all to the future generations. Here below, I reported the five grades with correspondent definition:

Safe (5): The language is spoken by all generations. There is no sign of linguistic threat from any other language, and the intergenerational transmission of the language seems uninterrupted. Stable yet threatened.

Unsafe (4): Most but not all children or families of a particular community speak their language as their first language, but it may be restricted to specific social domains (such as at home where children interact with their parents and grandparents).

Definitively endangered (3): The language is no longer being learned as the mother tongue by children in the home. The youngest speakers are thus of the parental generation. At this stage, parents may still speak their language to their children, but their children do not typically respond in the language.

Severely endangered (2): The language is spoken only by grandparents and older generations; while the parent generation may still understand the language, they typically do not speak it to their children.

Critically endangered (1): The youngest speakers are in the great-grandparental generation, and the language is not used for everyday interactions. These older people often remember only part of the language but do not use it, since there may not be anyone to speak with.

Extinct (0): There is no one who can speak or remember the language (UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment 2003, 7-8).

The closer the grades are to 5, the more the language can be considered vital; the closer they are to 0, the more the language is at risk. UNESCO openly states that these grades and factors have to be taken as a general guideline and users have to adapt them in accordance with their research aims (UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment 2003, 17). In my analysis, I consider these aspects to investigate the relation between language vitality and language policy. It is clearly very difficult to estimate with precision the exact mark to attribute to each factor. I assign them on the basis of the collected material, abiding as much as possible by the definitions corresponding to each grade; when the data were very limited, it was not possible to assign a specific mark to the factor. Having clarified the core concepts of my analysis, in the next section, I discuss in detail the linguistic measures implemented on the Evenks in the considered time frames.

3. Language Policy and the Evenki Language: From the Early Soviet Union Until Today

In this section, I discuss the language policy the Evenks were subject to at the beginning of the Soviet Union, from the late 1930s to the Brezhnev era, and from *perestroika* until today. The first stage includes the reforms under Lenin and Stalin in the first years of his government. The policy of this period reveals a supportive attitude towards linguistic minorities within the Union. In the second phase, I include the policies followed by Stalin from 1938 on, by Khrushchev, and by Brezhnev. Although based on different ideologies, the linguistic policies followed by these leaders aimed to overcome the ethnic and linguistic diversity, prioritising Russian culture and language over non-Russian ones, including Evenki. In the third stage, I discuss the legislative measures taking place from *perestroika* until today, which should be focused on the revitalisation and protection of minority groups within the territories of the Soviet Union/ Russian Federation.

3.1 Language Policy in the Early Soviet Union

In its early stage, the Soviet government adopted a supportive approach towards the minorities. This first phase of linguistic policy is known as *korenizatsiia*, or indigenisation, of the Northern peoples and it was initiated by Vladimir Lenin. The two main goals of this policy were to promote the economic development within the Union and to end the Russification undergone in the Tsarist era.

Linguistically, *korenizatsiia* implied the usage of indigenous languages in public life, education, culture, publishing, and government spheres. The promotion of national languages and cultures would have formed a new work force contributing to the development of the new Communist state. In November 1917, right after the Bolshevik Revolution, the Declaration of the Peoples of Russia was signed by Lenin. This document abolished all national restrictions and privileges, stating the self-determination and equality of the peoples of Russia and ensuring the development and protection of minority groups:

‘Consistently with the will of these congresses, the Council of People’s Commissars decided to base the activities on the question of the nationalities of Russia on the following principles:

- 1) Equality and sovereignty of the peoples of Russia.*

- 2) *The right of the peoples of Russia to free self-determination, up to the separation and formation of an independent state.*
- 3) *Abolition of all and any national and national-religious privileges and restrictions.*
- 4) *Free development of national minorities and ethnographic groups inhabiting the territory of Russia* (Declaration of the Peoples of Russia, November 2(15)1917).⁶

Even though Lenin strongly supported the fundamental role of Russian within the Union, he also believed that ‘if it were to become the official language of the Soviet Union or a compulsory subject in non-Russian schools, it would drive people away’ (Green 1997, 242). Starting from 1921, he initiated the work to create literary languages, leading to the formulation of fifty-two new alphabets. This project also included the usage of the Latin script over the Cyrillic one, as Lenin perceived the latter as the symbol of ‘tsarist imperialism’ (Kirkwood 1991, 62) and ‘of Great Russian chauvinism (Green 1997, 242). In 1930, the alphabet of the North with the Latin script was formulated.

As an effect of these legislative measures, in 1931, the standard Evenki alphabet appeared for the first time. The Latin script was chosen and the first dialect basing the literary language was the Nep one, the southern dialect which was spoken in the Irkutsk area (Grenoble and Whaley 1999, 376). At that time, this variety was supposed to share several phonological, lexical, and morphological features with most Evenki dialects. Therefore, it was considered the best choice for the new literary language. In 1952, the government decided to switch the base of literary Evenki ‘from the Nep dialect to the dialects of the Podkammeno-Tungus subgroup, in particular, the Poliguov dialect’ (Grenoble and Whaley 1999, 376). One of the reasons for this modification was that the Nep dialect speakers, driven to resettlement and collectivisation by the new Soviet policy, did not represent a uniform dialect community anymore; they were indeed distributed in a wider area where they came

⁶ This is my own translation of the original text from Russian into English. Here below, the original version: *‘Исполняя волю этих съездов, Совет Народных Комиссаров решил положить в основу своей деятельности по вопросу о национальностях России следующие начала:*

- 1) *Равенство и суверенность народов России.*
- 2) *Право народов России на свободное самоопределение, вплоть до отделения и образования самостоятельного государства.*
- 3) *Отмена всех и всяких национальных и национально-религиозных привилегий и ограничений.*
- 4) *Свободное развитие национальных меньшинств и этнографических групп, населяющих территорию России’* (Декларация прав народов России 2(15) ноября 1917 г- Deklaratsiia Prav Narodov Rossii 2(15) Noiabria 1917 g.). See <http://www.hist.msu.ru/ER/Text/DEKRET/peoples.htm> for the full text

in contact also with non-Nep speakers. According to new policy, the literary language has to be based on the dialect spoken in the Evenk Autonomous Okryg. (Grenoble and Whaley 1999, 376).

In order to facilitate the implementation of language policy and the development of literary languages, already at the beginning of the 1920s, it was essential to intensify the education of the Northern peoples. In 1936, Article 121 of the Constitution clearly stated the right of the indigenous peoples to be educated in their native languages:

ARTICLE 121. Citizens of the U.S.S.R. have the right to education.

This right is ensured by universal, compulsory elementary education; by education, including higher education, being free of charge; by the system of state stipends for the overwhelming majority of students in the universities and colleges; by instruction in schools being conducted in the native language, and by the organization in the factories, state farms, machine and tractor stations and collective farms of free vocational, technical and agronomic training for the working people (1936 Constitution of the USSR)⁷.

The first curricula designed for the teaching of native languages were inspired by the teachings of the American philosopher and educator John Dewey, ‘and in particular by his “action”-oriented curriculum (1900). They [The Soviet leadership] saw this as a means of breaking away from the old, rote methods of tsarist education, and some adapted Dewey’s methods to emphasize production-specific curricula. The emphasis on production was meant as a part of a broader educational goal - to inculcate in Siberian children a sense of the inherent value of their own sociocultural “stage” ’ (Bloch 2004, 100).

The indigenisation policy implemented in the first years of Communism was initially supported by Joseph Stalin. Lenin chose him as responsible of the nationality question because, being Georgian, ‘he [Stalin] was supposed to be a more justifiable person for the job than a Russian’ (Green 1997, 243). At the very beginning, Stalin’s attitude towards the linguistic question and the Northern minorities was not that different from Lenin’s. Following the slogan that he himself coined ‘ “national in form, socialist in content” ’ (Green 1997, 243), he rejected any special privileges for the Russian language. As with Lenin, at the beginning Stalin saw in the prioritisation of the Russian language and culture the risk of an exasperating nationalism and the ‘Great-Russian Chauvinism.’ In 1923, during the 12th Party Congress, he stated:

⁷ See <https://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/1936toc.html> for the full text

‘[The] Great-Russian chauvinist spirit, which is becoming stronger and stronger owing to the N.E.P., ... [finds] expression in an arrogantly disdainful and heartlessly bureaucratic attitude on the part of Russian Soviet officials towards the needs and requirements of the national republics. The multi-national Soviet state can become really durable, and the co-operation of the peoples within it really fraternal, only if these survivals are vigorously and irrevocably eradicated from the practice of our state institutions. Hence, the first immediate task of our Party is vigorously to combat the survivals of Great-Russian chauvinism.

The main danger, Great-Russian chauvinism, should be kept in check by the Russians themselves, for the sake of the larger goal of building socialism. Within the (minority) nationality areas, new institutions should be organized, giving the state a national (minority) character everywhere, built on the use of the nationality languages in government and education, and on the recruitment and promotion of leaders from the ranks of minority groups. On the central level, the nationalities should be represented in the Soviet of Nationalities’ (Stalin 1923)⁸.

In the language planning of the new Soviet leader, the majority of non-Russian languages were involved and by 1934, dictionaries, textbooks, and grammars, had been published in 104 different languages (Green 1997, 243). In 1933-1934, indeed, in the Evenk National Territory, Evenki became part of the primary schools’ curricula. Thus, the first stage of language policy taking place in the early Soviet Union was characterised by legislative measures aiming to support and encourage the development of linguistic minorities. However, from the late 1930s to the Brezhnev era, the Evenks and all the Siberian groups were subject to legislative measures very different from the previous ones.

3.2 Language Policy from the Late 1930s to the Brezhnev era

3.2.1 Changes in Stalinist Language Policy

From the late 1930s on, Stalin’s attitudes towards linguistic policies radically changed, as he adopted a policy of ruthless Russification and assimilation. According to him, ‘it was the

⁸ See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korenizatsiya> for the full text

best way to control the clash between nation-building and multi-ethnicity' (Green 1997, 244). He argued that ethnic assimilation proceeds as follows:

'[from] the establishment of a linguistic community and the development of a consciousness of peoplehood (narodnost), through the operation of the forces of capitalism leading to the formation of a bourgeois nationality (natsional nost), to a true socialist nationhood, free of all vestiges of class or property' (Stalin in Green 1997, 244⁹).

During his mandate, the prioritisation of the Russian language became the nucleus of the new linguistic reforms. In March 1938, the decree On the Obligatory Study of Russian Language in Schools in the National Republic and Provinces was approved, making the study and the use of Russian compulsory among the Evenks and all the indigenous groups (Anderson and Silver in Haak 2016, 24). Stalin justified this decree saying that, after the previous policy promoting the other languages and ethnicities existing within the Union, Russian had become extremely weak.

In light of these new policies, in 1937-1938 the Soviets decreed to change the Latin scripts into Cyrillic ones. This new measure involved Evenki as well, which switched from the Latin to the Russian script in 1937. However, the application of this law was not very easy among the Evenks. After the script reform was approved, many schools continued to refer to the Latin alphabet, as most of the new books had been hastily prepared and they were full of orthographic errors (Mikulcova 2017, 34). These practical issues considerably delayed the teaching of Russian in most Evenk and indigenous schools (Blitstein in Mikulcova 2017, 34).

The application of these new linguistic measures was motivated neither by linguistic reasons, nor pedagogical, nor by practical ones. It can be interpreted as a political decision aiming to intensify the process of Russification in the Northern territories and to create a uniform Soviet society. Indeed, most of the linguists that contributed to the formulation of the Latin script for all the indigenous languages were immediately arrested (Grenoble in Haak 2016, 25). The legislative measures adopted during this phase of Stalinism paved the way to the radical Russification policy undertaken by Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev.

⁹ Green also mentions as reference Symmons-Symonolewicz, Konstantin. 1972. *The Non-Slavic Peoples of the Soviet Union VI*

3.2.2 Language Policy under Khrushchev and Brezhnev

In the middle between Leninist indigenisation plans and Khrushchev's aggressive Russification programme, Stalin's policy was undoubtedly oriented to strengthening the influence and the predominance of Russian language and culture over the other national groups, but it was not strong enough to lead to 'the total obliteration of minority languages' (Green 1997, 246).

In 1953, Khrushchev became the new leader of the Union. According to him, 'the Soviet system had changed the social consciousness of the national groups. They had moved from national consciousness to socialist consciousness, and were moving toward communist consciousness' (Green 1997, 248). Therefore, all the USSR nations had to advance toward merging into a single nation, *sliianie*. In light of this perspective, there was no need to promote the linguistic diversity within the Union, rather Russian had to be established as the communication language. Under Khrushchev, indeed, Russian replaced the majority of indigenous languages in both public and official realms.

The first step to implement the Russification plan was represented by the Educational Reforms of 1956-1959. In 1956, during the 20th Party Congress of the Soviet Union, Khrushchev approved the creation of the boarding school system (Haak 2016, 25). In these institutions, the teaching occurred exclusively in Russian and the speaking of native languages was forbidden. The new educational reform was an indispensable tool to facilitate the spread of the Communist ideology. Indeed, most of the teachers in the new schools came directly from Russia and the government explicitly gave them the task of educating the Northern peoples in the Soviet ideology. This programme was then incorporated by the new educational reform law in 1958, revoking the teaching in national languages, in order to make Russian the first language for both Russians and non-Russians.

Since the establishment of the boarding school system, most Evenk children were educated in these institutions. They were supposed to spend nine months there during which the indigenous language was not allowed. All the classes were taught in Russian, which was also the language of communication among both Russian and non-Russian students. This education system was made compulsory for Evenks and for all the indigenous groups between the ages of seven and fifteen. Evenk children entered these institutions as early as nursery school. However, the system of boarding schools appeared to be particularly useful for the rural and nomadic populations like the Evenks, as otherwise they would not have had any access to institutionalised education. These institutions are in place even now, and the children of reindeer herding families live here for nine months. In some cases, 'the wives of

reindeer herders remain in their villages rather than tending the herds so that their children can live with them, though even in these cases, the language of village is Russian' (Grenoble and Whaley 1999, 377).

The Russification policy undertaken by Brezhnev was on the same track as the one implemented by his predecessor. The main goal was indeed to educate the indigenous peoples in the Russian language and the Communist ideology with the aim of '“merging”' (Green 1997, 252) the nation. His policy, indeed, aimed 'to establish “a single Soviet ethnic group” that would be created by “fusion of the various nationalities into a supra-nationality”' (Grenoble in Mikulcova 2017, 37) and Russian language was the fundamental tool to reach this goal. From the 1960s on, the Russification of the North became ever-increasing and it aimed to establish Russian as '“the first mother tongue of the non-Russian population of the USSR”' (Brunchis in Grenoble and Whaley 1999, 378). In October 1978, the decree On Measures for Further Improving the Study and Teaching of the Russian Language in the Union Republics was approved to enhance the quality of education in the national language.

As a result of this aggressive policy, education in indigenous languages drastically decreased. At the beginning of the '60s, 47 different languages were used for instruction in Russian Republics; in the last years of Brezhnev's rule, only sixteen can be identified (Kreindler in Mikulcova 2017, 36). In the years between the late '50s and the late '70s, the state of Evenki in the education was noticeably weakened: while in 1958, it was allowed in the first and second grade, in 1977 it was banned from the Evenks' instruction and it was replaced by Russian (Haak 2016, 25).

Thus, both the linguistic reforms followed by Khrushchev and Brezhnev were oriented to make the non-Russian minorities '[flourish] under the umbrella of Soviet culture and with the assistance of the Russian people' (Green 1997, 249). During these decades, Russian acquired the status of lingua franca within the Soviet Union.

3.3 From *Perestroika* Until Today

3.3.1 From *Perestroika* to the Collapse of the Soviet Union

In the late '80s, the protests among native groups started increasing, as they reclaimed better life conditions and the rights of using their languages. In the case of the Evenks, the feeling of rebellion was captured by radio broadcasts and local newspapers in their Autonomous

Okrug. To this subversive attempt, the central government of Moscow, in 1990, responded with the approval of the Law on the Languages of Peoples of USSR which remained valid until 1991 (Grenoble in Mikulcova 2017, 38). Even though this legislative measure confirmed Russian as the national language, it also aimed to protect the linguistic minorities within the Union and to support their development:

‘The Soviet Union provides the citizens of the USSR with the conditions for use in various spheres of state and public life the languages of the peoples of the USSR, (it) cares about their revival, preservation and development. Citizens of the USSR should take care of the language as the spiritual heritage of the people, develop their native language in every possible way, respect the languages of other peoples of the USSR. This Law establishes general principles of language policy in the USSR, guarantees of free development and use of languages of the peoples of the USSR, the legal regime of the language of official relations in the framework of the Soviet Federation, the rights of citizens in the use of languages peoples of the USSR. This Law does not regulate the use of the languages of peoples USSR in interpersonal informal relationships’ (Law on the Languages of Peoples of USSR 1990)¹⁰.

The linguistic plans to protect the minority groups became more intense after the collapse of the Soviet Union, through national and international legislations. The 1993 Russian Federation’s Constitution establishes the citizens’ right of choosing and using the language of communication, although Russian was still considered the state language of the Federation:

¹⁰ This is my own translation from Russian into English. Here below the original text:

‘ЗАКОН О ЯЗЫКАХ НАРОДОВ СССР

Советское государство обеспечивает гражданам СССР условия для использования в различных сферах государственной и общественной жизни языков народов СССР, заботится об их возрождении, сохранении и развитии. Граждане СССР должны бережно относиться к языку как духовному достоянию народа, всемерно развивать родной язык, уважать языки других народов СССР. Настоящий Закон устанавливает общие принципы языковой политики в СССР, гарантии свободного развития и использования языков народов СССР, правовой режим языка официальных взаимоотношений в рамках советской федерации, права граждан в использовании языков народов СССР. Настоящий Закон не регулирует использование языков народов СССР в межличностных неофициальных взаимоотношениях’ (Закон О Языках Народов СССР- Zakon O Iazykakh Narodov SSSR). See <http://www.economics.kiev.ua/download/ZakonySSSR/data01/tex10935.htm>

2. *‘Everyone shall have the right to use his (her) native language and to a free choice of the language of communication, upbringing, education and creative work’ (Russian Federation’s Constitution 1993, Art. 26).*¹¹

Regarding the Evenks, I found the case of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) consistent with my discussion. This is one of the ten autonomous Turkic Republics part of the Russian Federation, located in northeastern Siberia (Official Informative Portal of Sakha Republic (Yakutia) 2018). In these territories, approximately 21,080 Evenks are settled, although the ethnic composition mainly consists of Yakuts and Russians. In October 1992, the Law on Languages in the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) was approved, establishing a legal basis for the linguistic policy aiming to elaborate ‘a system of state measures to revive, preserve, develop, and encourage the use of native languages by the republic’s native peoples, [thus of Evenki as well]’ (Robbek 1998, 118). This law was formulated on the basis of the ‘Conception and state programme of renewal and development of national schools in the Sakha Republic,’ adopted in 1991 and stating the following principles:

‘ “The need for the revival of languages, the broadening of their functions...require that the entire system of education and training in national schools be reorganized. The Conception’s major principle is to realize the democratic and constitutional right to education and training of students in their native language. Native language should function as a language of pre-school and school-age education, and should be the decisive factor in the revival of national schools, the development of national cultures and the self-preservation of the native peoples of our republic” ’ (Conception and state programme of renewal and development of national schools in the Sakha Republic in Robbek 1998, 119).

Based on this principle, the Law on the Languages in the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) stated that the languages of northern minority groups were all ‘official languages in all places where they live in compact groupings’ (Robbek 1998, 119). In 1996, the President of the Republic signed a decree establishing the official Day of Native Language and Literature, valid for all the minority groups living there, including the Evenks (Robbek 1998, 119). Thus, the years from *perestroika* to the first post-Soviet decades were characterised by new linguistic reforms focused on protecting minority languages and their revitalisation.

¹¹This article is taken from the Russian Federation's Constitution of 1993 with Amendments through 2008, page 7. See https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Russia_2008.pdf for the full text

3.3.2 Today's Language Policy

In recent decades, the Russian government has taken further steps to regulate the usage of Russian and minority languages within the Federation. During his first mandate, in 2005, Vladimir Putin approved the Law on the State Language of the Russian Federation which proclaims Russian as the state language, guarantying its development and protection. This Law also specifies the domains in which Russian language has to be used, which are the public, social, governmental, and educational ones.

'This Federal Law is aimed at ensuring the use of the state language of the Russian Federation throughout the Russian Federation, ensuring the right of citizens of the Russian Federation to use the state language of the Russian Federation, and the protection and development of language culture.

Article 1. The Russian Language as a State Language of the Russian Federation

1. In accordance with the Constitution of the Russian Federation, the official language of the Russian Federation throughout its territory is the Russian language.

2. The status of the Russian language as a state language of the Russian Federation provides for the mandatory use of the Russian language in the areas defined by this Federal Law, other federal laws, the Russian Federation Law No. 1807-I of October 25, 1991 "On the Languages of the Peoples of the Russian Federation" and other regulatory legal acts of the Russian Federation, its protection and support, as well as ensuring the right of citizens of the Russian Federation to use the state language of the Russian Federation' (Federal Law of 1 June 2005 No. 53-FZ On the State Language of the Russian Federation)¹².

¹² This is my own translation from Russian into English. Here below, the original text:

'Настоящий Федеральный закон направлен на обеспечение использования государственного языка Российской Федерации на всей территории Российской Федерации, обеспечение права граждан Российской Федерации на пользование государственным языком Российской Федерации, защиту и развитие языковой культуры.

Статья 1. Русский язык как государственный язык Российской Федерации

1. В соответствии с Конституцией Российской Федерации государственным языком Российской Федерации на всей ее территории является русский язык.

2. Статус русского языка как государственного языка Российской Федерации предусматривает обязательность использования русского языка в сферах, определенных настоящим Федеральным законом, другими федеральными законами, Законом Российской Федерации от 25 октября 1991 года N 1807-I "О языках народов Российской Федерации" и иными нормативными правовыми актами Российской Федерации, его защиту и поддержку, а также обеспечение права граждан

In spite of the approval of this law strengthening the supremacy of Russian within the Federation, the government has recently shown a rather supportive attitude toward the linguistic minorities. In 2015, President Vladimir Putin took part in the Meeting of the Council for Interethnic Relations and the Council for the Russian Language. He remarked that the current attitude of the Russian government is oriented to the defense and development of ethnic and linguistic minorities living within the Federation boundaries. Furthermore, he also brought into the foreground that currently, Russia is the homeland of many indigenous groups that still can practice their languages.

'The preservation and development of the Russian language and the languages of all Russian ethnic groups and nationalities are of vital importance for ensuring harmony in interethnic relations and civic unity and for strengthening Russia's national sovereignty and integrity.

It would be no exaggeration to say that the support and care languages enjoy in this country have never existed anywhere in the world. [...]. I would like to add here that the Russian Constitution guarantees the right of all peoples to preserve their languages and to create conditions for their study and development. This includes the right of the republics to declare their own official languages and use them in the functioning of their bodies of power alongside Russia's state language. Take Crimea: it has 3 equal languages – Russian, Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar' (Putin 2015 in the Council for Interethnic Relations and the Council for the Russian Language)¹³.

The current attitude of the Russian government towards the minorities is rather supportive, although, at the moment, there seems to be no further legislative measures at the national level. In the case of Evenks living in the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), however, some laws were recently approved. In 2004, the Law on the Status of Minorities of the North of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) was promulgated. It allowed the development of some target programmes for the development of minority languages, among which there is Evenki. They provide:

Российской Федерации на пользование государственным языком Российской Федерации' (Федеральный закон от 1 июня 2005 г. N 53-ФЗ О государственном языке Российской Федерации - Federal'nyi zakon ot 1 iunia 2005 g. N 53-F3 O gosydarstvennom iazyke Rossiiskoi Federatsii). See <https://rg.ru/2005/06/07/azyk-dok.html> for the full text

¹³ See <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/49491> for the full discourse

*'the creation of conditions for the use of indigenous languages of all peoples of the North in various spheres of life; the creation of a system of continuous education and upbringing of the younger generation in their native language; the publication of teaching aids and literature; the creation of conditions for scientific research in the field of conservation, research and development; the creation of conditions for the spread of messages and materials through the mass media'*¹⁴ (Article 5 in Bang 2015, 40).

However, the Law states that the official languages of this Republic are Russian and Yakut. Examining the language policies implemented within the Soviet Union/Russian Federation from the late '80s until today, it would seem that these plans have rather been to develop and to protect minority languages, although Russian still remains the national language.

Conclusions

In this section, I have described the language policies implemented on linguistic minorities from the early Soviet Union until today, focusing on the Evenks. I identified three different stages to discuss these policies: the beginning of the Soviet period, from the late '30s to the Brezhnev era, and from *perestroika* until today. In each of these stages, the language policies have been based on specific ideologies and aims. In the first phase, Lenin and Stalin supported the linguistic diversity within the Union in order to prevent nationalistic and Chauvinistic tendencies. In these decades, the Evenki alphabet was created based on the Latin script. In the second stage, I took into account Stalin's policy in the late '30s, alongside those of his successors, Khrushchev and Brezhnev. Apart from the different ideologies basing the linguistic plans they adopted, these decades were characterised by a rather aggressive Russification policy aiming to prioritise Russian language and culture, representing the essence of the Communist state and society. During these years, the Evenks, as well as all the other linguistic minorities, saw the change of their alphabet's script from Latin into Cyrillic. Furthermore, they also had to attend the boarding schools established by Khrushchev to improve their knowledge of Russian. The third phase opens with *perestroika*

¹⁴ This is my own translation from Russian into English. Here below, the original text:

'[...]создание условий для использования языков коренных малочисленных народов Севера в различных сферах жизни; создание системы непрерывного обучения и воспитания подрастающего поколения на родном языке; издание учебных пособий, литературы; создание условий для научных исследований в области сохранения, изучения и развития; создание условий для распространения через средства массовой информации сообщений и материалов' (Article 5 in Bang 2015, 40)

and it involves a series of linguistic reforms aiming at the protection of minority languages, although they still state the role of Russian as the national language. In order to investigate how this policy was applied to the Evenks, I took into account the Republic of Sakha and the legislative acts implemented there. In the next section, I will investigate the vitality of Evenki in light of these legislative measures.

4. The Vitality of Evenki from the Early Soviet Union Until Today

In order to diachronically investigate the vitality of Evenki in relation to language policies, I take into account the nine UNESCO factors established by the Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages in 2003. In this section, I discuss each factor in relation to the linguistic legislation applied in the early Soviet period, from the late '30s to the Brezhnev era, and from *perestroika* until today. To establish the vitality of Evenki in these three stages, I will refer to the UNESCO criteria. As I already specified, for each factor there are six grades ranging from 0 to 5. However, for some aspects, the limited available data did not allow for a precise estimation of the grade. Although in attributing the ranks to each factor I abided as much as possible by the UNESCO criteria, the grades define only approximately the status of the language in relation to a specific aspect, and I attributed them on the basis of the material I was able to collect.

4.1 Intergenerational Language Transmission

The first factor is the intergenerational language transmission which is useful to assess the active use and maintenance of the language over the course of time. To discuss the transmission of Evenki in the early Soviet phase, I found particularly interesting the research conducted by Mira Sivtseva, an Evenk woman from Kutana (Republic of Sakha) in 1990. Investigating the revitalisation of this language, she collected several interviews from native speakers belonging to different generations, of which the elder ones were born during the '30s and the '40s. Although it is not possible to generalise on the basis of one set of interviews, this example still provides useful information for my case study. Examining the transmission of Evenki through generations, she takes into account the example of her family. Mira asked her 70-year-old great-grandmother to teach her some words in the native language, such as names of animals and of natural phenomena. Born in 1932, she was the only and the last member in her family who still possesses a solid knowledge of Evenki. Her great-grandmother told her that, when the usage of Russian was not compulsory yet, the generation of speakers belonging to the early '30s still used to speak the local language in daily communication and to transfer it to their children (Sivtseva 2015, 20). Considering the limited data available in this case, it is not possible to determine an exact grade for this factor according to the UNESCO criteria.

In parallel with the implementation of the Russification policy started in the late '30s, the intergenerational transmission of language was rather low. In particular, during

Khrushchev's rule, with the creation of the boarding schools, children were forced to learn and to speak Russian, having no chance to practice their local language. As many parents observed, when their children returned home for the summer break, they could barely understand a few words in Evenki, but they were not able to speak it fluently nor to handle entire conversations (Mamontova 2014, 45). Parents were only able to teach them few words and basic expressions. This data is further confirmed in Mamontova's research on Evenki vitality. She investigated the status of this language in the district of Krasnoyarsk Krai, interviewing those pupils studying in Tura boarding schools. Most of them confirm that they do not know Evenki at all and that they have learnt few words at home and never used it in their everyday life, as Russian is for them the language of communication:

'[...] I still don't know it [Evenki] even now, though this is my language supposedly . . . Nobody spoke this language with me since early childhood . . . even though this is one of those what you'd call dying languages; I ought to know it (PMA, 2001-1a)' (Mamontova 2014, 43).

Although quite often parents state that their children know Evenki, Mamontova remarks that actually they can barely understand what adults talk about or they can capture some words and phrases, but their first language is Russian. This frequently happens in those communities living 'in a situation of language shift, when the older generation still freely speaks the ethnic language, while the younger one can barely say a few words' (Mamontova 2014, 40). In this case, the language is classified as 'definitively endangered'- grade 3 of endangerment- as it 'is used mostly by the parental generation and up' (UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment 2003, 8).

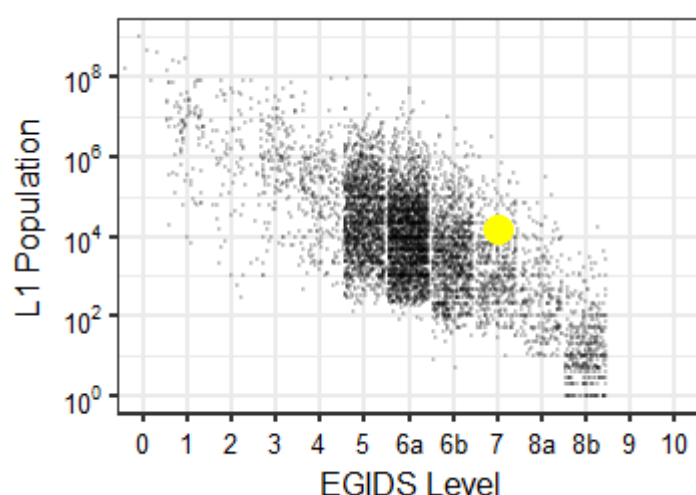
The decades from *perestroika* until today do not show an increase in terms of language transmission. In this regard, Mamontova in 2001 conducted a study on the Evenks living in Surinda and in Ekonda, both located in Krasnoyarsk Krai. In the first case, only the elder generation knows Evenki. The representatives of the middle generations and of the young, around twenty-five years old, were able to understand only something in Evenki, while more than a third did not speak it at all.

'As for the younger generation—children and youth under twenty-five—in the best-case scenario they can understand the language. I know of only a few young people who know Evenki well, who grew up with their parents in the taiga. They admitted that they did not have anybody to converse with while their own comprehension of the rich language of

the old folks is not as good as their parents (PMP 2010-1b; PMA 2011-2a; PMA 2011-2b)’ (Mamontova 2014, 50).

In Ekonda, Mamontova observed a quite similar situation. It seems that adults spoke with the oldest members in Evenki, ‘but when children entered the tent, the grandfather addressed them first in Evenki and then in Russian; the children answered in Russian’ (Mamontova 2014, 50). Thus, in both cases, young generations do not show any real knowledge of the local language, which suggests that they have never learnt it properly.

As further confirmation of the limited transmission of Evenki, I also considered the Ethnologue Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS), which establishes seven levels measuring ‘the level of disruption of intergenerational transmission. Therefore, stronger, more vital languages have lower numbers on the scale and weaker, more endangered languages have higher numbers’ (Ethnologue Language of the World 2018)¹⁵. On the basis of this classification, Evenki is labeled on Level 7, which means that ‘the child-bearing generations can use the language among themselves, but it is not being transmitted to children’ (Ethnologue Language of the World 2018). In the Ethnologue graphic below, Evenki is represented by the yellow spot indicating that intergenerational transmission is almost interrupted. In this case, the language is defined as ‘critically endangered’-grade 1 of endangerment- as it is spoken ‘mostly by very few speakers, of great-grandparental generation’(UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment 2003, 8).



Graphic 1. EGIDS Level (Ethnologue 20018)

¹⁵ See <https://www.ethnologue.com/about/language-status> for a clear overview of the scale

Thus, in the early 30s, Evenki was spoken not only among older people, but it was also transmitted to the future generations. On the contrary, during the peak of Russification, Evenki was mostly used by parental generations, but not really transmitted to children. In the years from *perestroika* until today, Evenki is actually not spoken by children-bearing generations, rather it is used by great-grand parental ones.

4.2 Absolute Number of Speakers and Proportion of the Speakers within the Total

In this section, I consider both the absolute number of speakers and the proportion of speakers within the total population. On the basis of the available data, it was not possible to determine the exact number of Evenki speakers in the early Soviet Union. It would have been very useful to have the data of the 1920-26 Russian census, but they seem to be unavailable. This might be explained by the fact that in that period, Evenks were spread over the wide territory of Siberia and the Soviet Far East, which made the exact calculation of native speakers very difficult. Furthermore, as I already clarified, until 1931, Evenki showed three different main dialects and many other sub-dialects; only in 1931, under Lenin, were they all unified in the standard literary form and in the Latin alphabet. Before then, it was not possible to talk about the standard Evenki language, which made the exact estimation of speakers even more complicated. However, according to Comrie, after Evenki received a literary form, it was spoken by most of the groups living within the Soviet Union until the late '50s - the peak of the Russification; from that moment on, the number of speakers started declining (Comrie 1981, 58). This lets me hypothesize that, in the early Soviet period, the language was still actively used by most Evenks.

From the Khrushchev era until 1979, a decrease in the level of speakers can be observed. In the table below, I collected all the data on the number of speakers. In twenty years, from 1959 to 1979, the percentage of native speakers decreased by 8% within the total number of Evenks, which oscillated from 24,710 to 27,249 (The Peoples of the Red Book 2018). Considering the UNESCO criteria, in 1959 and 1970, Evenki could still be considered 'definitively endangered,' as 'a majority speak the language' (UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment 2003, 9); thus, the endangerment grade corresponds to 3. At the end of the '70s, only 'a minority speak the language' (UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment 2003, 9) and it is classified as 'severely endangered,' corresponding to grade 2.

		Native Speakers
1897	62,068	(including the Evens and others; the number of Evenks was probably 19,800 with the percentage of native speakers 44.5%). Some sources put this number at 64,500 (The Peoples of the Red Book 2018).
1926/27	38,804	?
1959	24,710	55.9 %
1970	25,149	51.3 %
1979	27,294	42.8 %
1989	30,233	30.4%
1998	30,000	33.33%
2002	35,527	12.89%
2010	38,400	12.50%

Table 1. *Evenki Native Speakers* (The Peoples of the Red Book)¹⁶

In the decades from *perestroika* until today, the number of native speakers has continued to decrease. The 1989 census reports that 30.4% of Evenks (Pika, Dahl, and Larsen 1996, 39), of a total of 30,233 in the USSR (The Peoples of the Red Book), were native speakers. From 1998 on, a radical decrease of ethnic Evenks in Russia parallels the decline of native speakers. In 1998, there were approximately 30,000 ethnic Evenks living in the Russian territory, but only 33.33% of them- 1/3 of people (Wikipedia 2018)- spoke the language. Still, according to the 2002 Russian census reports, there are 35,527 citizens of the Russian Federation who identify themselves as ethnically Evenki, but only 12.89%- 7, 580 people (Lewis in Wikipedia 2018)- are language speakers. The 2010 census shows that Russia has 38,400 Evenks overall (Haak 2016, 3) living within the borders and only 12.50% of them- corresponding to 4,800 people (Ethnologue Evenki SIL International Publications (2016) in Haak 2016, 35)- speak their native language. In this case, the degree of endangerment is equal to 1- ‘critically endangered’- as ‘very few people speak the language’ (UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment 2003, 9).

¹⁶ The data in the table going from 1926/27 to 1989 are taken from The Peoples of the Red Book, as mention above. Then, to give a clearer overview, I completed the table adding the number of speakers regarding also the years 1998-2010. For all the years, I calculated the proportions in percentage on the basis of the available numeric data.

The collected data show that, since the '50s, when the Russification policy reached its peak, the number of Evenki speakers started decreasing. Even the decades of *perestroika* and those following the collapse of the Union were characterised by the evident decline of Evenki speakers.

4.3 Trends in Domains of Language Use

This factor indicates the domains in which the speakers use their language. At the beginning of the Soviet regime and in the period right before the collectivisation, Evenki was eventually perceived as the primary marker of Evenk culture (Mamontova 2014, 47). It was particularly associated with the nomadic way of life and the reindeer breeding, representing the main activity of these peoples. A consistent part of Evenki vocabulary and expressions referred to this practice and they were used in daily communication. In the '30s, the Soviet government re-organised the production in the Northern territories, forcing these groups into sedentarisation. This new system forced the Evenks- as well as all the indigenous populations- to settle, to cease private reindeer breeding, and to give their animals to the collective farms. Mamontova's interviewees 'explain the causes of the language shift as the removal of the language from the sphere of active use, due to the crisis in reindeer herding' (Mamontova 2014, 47). Considering that Evenki was perceived as a 'cultural marker' and it was used in everyday communication and at home, it can be classified as used in 'dwindling domains'; the grade of endangerment is 3¹⁷ (UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment 2003, 10).

A strong decline of Evenki in daily communication took place starting from the '50s. The boarding school system in particular made it very difficult to employ this language in daily conversations. Many Evenki activists confirmed that 'the boarding school was at fault for the disappearance of Evenki culture and language from their everyday life' (Mamontova 2014, 44). As here the speaking of any other language but Russian was forbidden, when children came back home to their families after spending nine months in these institutions, parents realised their limited knowledge of their local language; it was basically impossible for them to have entire conversations in Evenki (Sivtseva 2015, 34). It was therefore spoken

¹⁷ According to UNESCO, the definition of dwindling domains is the following: 'The language is in home domains and for many functions, but the dominant language begins to penetrate even home domains' (UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages 2003, 10). There are not specific data attesting the usage of Russian in the early Soviet periods among the Evenks. However, I attributed the level 3 as my data confirmed that Evenki was still used in everyday communication and in home contexts.

in ‘limited domains’ mainly by elder generations, so the level of endangerment is equal to 2 (UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment 2003, 10).

Although since *perestroika*, the orientation of language policy changed, attempting to protect the minorities, the contexts in which Evenki is employed have been and are quite limited. In this regard, Mamontova noticed that in the Ekonda herding brigade, adults use ‘the mother tongue for communication with their children and with guests from the settlement, but Russian when addressing grandchildren. Using Evenki is complicated by the point that the parents of these children speak different idioms of Evenki, and thus prefer to communicate in Russian’ (Mamontova 2014, 50-51). Children can barely understand the most common phrases, thus the language of everyday conversation is Russian.

Even today in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), Sivtseva observed a similar situation. Here, Evenki speakers state that their language ‘has no practical use. We do not have the sphere to use it as a functioning language. A language must have a function to thrive. Only if we get autonomy where the Evenki language has all functions can we say that it has a real chance of revival. (Informant C)’ (Sivtseva 2015, 69).

Thus, in the early Soviet period, Evenki was perceived as the bearer of culture. Particularly related to the activity of reindeer breeding, it showed many expressions related to this activity and it was used as the language of communication. In the late ’30s, with the shift in the economy, Evenki slowly lost its active use. The situation worsened with the Russification plan which allowed the usage only of Russian. Even today, Evenki seems to have no real practical use. It is used in ‘highly limited domains,’ (UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment 2003, 10) with a grade of endangerment corresponding to 1.

4.4 Response to New Domains and Media

At the beginning of the Soviet regime, the state promoted the development of indigenous languages through the press. The Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia in 1917 clearly stated the fostering of the national press to encourage the development of national minorities within the Union. Thus, some of the Northern peoples, including Nanai, Even, and Evenks, had their own national presses until 1930. In 1933, the Far East Territorial Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) approved a decree to allow the publication of newspapers in all districts in native languages, in order to eradicate illiteracy. Part of the plan was to complete the setting up of printing houses in the Siberian regions to ensure the translation of the newspapers into indigenous languages. ‘In Nickolaievsk-on-

Amur, the following newspapers began to be printed: *Nivkhskaya Pravda* (Nivkh Truth) in Nivkh (1933), *Sekun Pokto* (New Way) in Nanai, and *Novaya Zhizn* (New Life) in Evenk' (Yakimov and Morrison 1995, 116). In 1934, also in the Vitim-Oleminsk district, some newspapers were published in Evenki. The language is defined by UNESCO as 'coping' and the corresponding grade is 2. 'The language is used in some new domains' (UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment 2003, 11), especially the press in this case.

Around the '40s, the publication of material in indigenous languages was subject to some restrictions. Although in some cases, the press in indigenous languages was still more or less active, the majority of national publications was in Russian only. 'In the North there were two kinds of papers: newspapers produced by Komsomols – the Communist Youth League – in every governing district composed of ethnic minorities; and nationally circulated Russian-language newspapers. There were only two northern Komsomol-published newspapers: one published in Yakutia, and the other in Buryatia.' (Peoples and Cultures of the Circumpolar World II Module 3 Changes in Expressions of Cultural Identity in Northwest Russia, Siberia and the Far East n.d., 11)¹⁸. The two newspapers were bilingual and they were useful for improving the readers' Russian skills. Thus, the usage of Evenki was 'minimal' (UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment 2003, 11) in relation to new domains and the endangered grade corresponded to 1.

During *glasnost*', the Northern press has experienced a slow revival. In 1990, the newspaper *Arun* was published, together with *Sovietskaia Evenkiia*. Today, in the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), there is just one local newspaper with only one page available in Evenki. In Evenkiia, there is the local journal *Evenkiiskaia Zhizn*' which is published once a week. It includes themes such as:

'activity of the authorities of ÉMR, socio-political events taking place in Evenkiia, the activities of public sector institutions, the activities of public organizations, economy, housing and utilities, northern delivery, social sphere, essays on people whose work is connected with Evenkiia, stories about the history of the Soviet and post-Soviet period, history and culture of the indigenous small-numbered peoples of Evenkiia, translated publications in the Evenki language, and many other topics that are important for the Evenk people' (Gazeta "Evenkiiskaia Zhizn'" - Evenkiiskaia Munitsipal'no Raiona' n.d.).¹⁹

¹⁸ See https://members.uarctic.org/media/880799/BCS322_Module3_Cultural-Identity-in-Russia.pdf

¹⁹ This is my own translation from Russian into English: Here below, the original text: <http://www.evenkya.ru/infoeg/>

'деятельность органов власти ЭМР, общественно-политические события, происходящие в Эвенкии, деятельность учреждений бюджетной сферы, деятельность общественных организаций, экономика,

Although it should be published in both Evenki and Russian, most of the pages are written in Russian. Even the usage and the frequency of television and radio broadcasts is not very high and it does not encourage the language revitalisation. An Evenk from the region of Yakutia confirms that ‘there are few platforms to use Evenki, [and] most of them are somewhat artificial. Once a week a TV show in Evenki called “Gevan” (Gevan means sunrise in Evenki) is broadcast for 15-30 minutes by the Yakut national TV channel²⁰. A version of the radio program “Gevan” is also broadcast once a week’ (Sivtseva 2015, 69).

In terms of new domains, it is possible to download an application called *эвэды* (Evenki) available on the Google Play store, and it can be used by all Android smartphones. It is an online Russian-Evenki dictionary and phrasebook, and it should help the usage of the native language. According to the data though, only 100 people have downloaded it up to now.

In the last 10 years, the status of Evenki has become a quite debated topic on social media. On the social network *vk.com*, for instance, there is a group representing the main platform for the use of this language. All the users are supposed to speak Evenki with each other, but none of them is actually really proficient. In 2013, in Yakutia, the e-learning program "Evenki language for beginners" was presented. It is meant to be distributed in the national Evenki schools and in specialized departments of higher and secondary educational institutions. Furthermore, the websites *evengus.ru* and *evenkiteka.ru* should also be mentioned (Sivtseva 2015, 79). They were created by Rustam Yusupov who lived in Irkutsk and who was the first to digitize the dictionaries of Boldyrev, a linguist from the Institute of Philology of the Siberian Department of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Although, according to him, the participation of the young in this group is quite considerable, none of them shows a high fluency or mastery of Evenki and the communication in this language is limited to a very superficial level. Thus, the domains in which Evenki is involved are many, but the duration of programmes and their coverage is very limited. According to UNESCO, the grade is 3 and the degree of endangerment is ‘receptive’ (UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment 2003, 11).

жилищно-коммунальное хозяйство, северный завоз, социальная сфера, очерки о людях, чья работа связана с Эвенкией, рассказы об истории советского и постсоветского периода, история и культура коренных малочисленных народов Эвенкии, переводные публикации на эвенкийском языке, и многие другие темы, важные для жителей Эвенкии’ (Газета "Эвенкийская жизнь"- Эвенкийского Муниципального Района’ n.d.)

²⁰ Sivtseva specifically mentions the following portal in relation to this information URL: http://www.teleguide.info/kanal1646_20141116.html national TV channel «NVK», Online portal of Association of the small-numbered indigenous peoples of Yakutia, published 07.05.2015 <http://yakutiakmns.org/archives/3423>

In the early '20s, the press in Evenki was relatively active, as the state saw in it an effective instrument to promote internationalism within the Union territories. Since the beginning of the Russification, the publication of material in Russian became fundamental to facilitate the learning of the national language. In the first post-Soviet decades, Evenki press and in general of the Northern people, was on a slow revival and even the response to mass media and new domains is still very limited.

4.5 Materials for Language Education and Literacy, and Amount and Quality of Documentation

In this section, I consider both the material for education and literacy and the amount and quality of documentation. During the *korenizatsiia*, the language policy aimed to facilitate the establishment of literacy in local languages, including Evenki. In 1927, the first primer in Evenki was published and right after, by the '30s, textbooks were available in this language. From 1919 to 1926, the Russian ethnographer, Titov, conducted several expeditions among the Evenki groups settled in the territories of the Northern Bikal, Vitim-Nerchinsk, and Upper Lena. The result of his research appeared in 1926 as a dictionary with approximately 3000 entries in Evenki. The end of the '20s was actually quite a prosperous period for Tungusology and in this regard, the works by G.M. Vasilevich are particularly remarkable. Alongside the publication of the school textbooks in 1929 and in 1930, she 'was also the author of the first Evenki language primer for school use, the first dialectological dictionary of Evenki [VASILEVICH 1934], and the first teacher's manual of Evenki grammar in which she tried to create a basis for standard (literary) Evenki language' (Atknine 1997, 113). Between 1948 and 1958, she also worked on Evenki-Russian and Russian-Evenki dictionaries. In this case, the grade for the accessibility of material corresponds to 4. 'Written materials exist, and at school, children are developing literacy in the language' (UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment 2003, 12).

From the '30s to the early '40s, there was a significant amount of documentation related to the study of the language itself. Among these, there are the works by Cincius, Kostantinova, Kolesnikova, Novikova, Kozlovskii, Konakov, Voskoboinikov, and Pukshanskaya focused on the analysis of Evenki grammar. In 1938, Cincius created the first Evenki-Russian dictionary with all the dialects and explaining their features (Atknine 1997, 113). During these years, literary production was particularly blooming, especially related to children's literature. Along with the development of oral folklore, the first editions of

handwritten works by Evenki writers appeared, such as those by as Khunt Elpin, Yukagir Spiridonov (Teki Odulok) and Evenki Salatkin and Nerguneev. In 1933, the first work of fiction in this language, a story by Naumov titled *How I Killed the Elk*, was published as a book by the publishing house ‘Molodaia Gvardiia’. Moreover, the classic works of Evenki literary schools appeared, such as the story *Red Suglan* (1938) and chapters of the novel *Margesha’s Dreams Come True* by Nikita Sakharov (Seredkina 2018, 620). In this case, the nature of the documentation is classified as ‘fair,’ corresponding to grade 3, as there is a sufficient amount of texts on the language, dictionaries, and literary works (UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment 2003, 16). In this case, there are no specific data regarding the quality of the documentation.

As far as I have observed, since the Russification of the North began, the documentation in Evenki was subject to decline. Most of the material circulating in schools was available only in Russian and it was focused on the spread of the Communist ideology. Among the main books circulating in Evenki, Slezkine mentions ‘*What is a Kolkhoz?; What is a Soviet?; What is a Court Trial?; The Party is Guiding Us; What the October Revolution Gave to the Toilers of the North; The Threat of War and Our Tasks; and How to Treat a Sick Person*’ (Slezkine 1994, 225). All of these works were written in Evenki- and all the other indigenous languages- in order to educate the indigenous peoples in the Soviet ideology. In 1938, the Constitution of the USSR and the Constitution of the RSFR (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic) were both translated into Evenki, as well as in Nanai, Nenets, Koryak, Chukchi (Lane, Costa, and Haley de Korne 2018, 124). In this case, the accessibility of education material is equal to 1, as the practical orthography was still known in the community and some written material in Evenki existed, but it was limited and aimed to educate the indigenous people in the Soviet ideology (UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment 2003, 12).

The years from the ’40s until the ’70s were characterised by a strong repression of minorities, which did not encourage literary production in the native language. Many writers were interdicted from their activity and their works disappeared. Only few works survived from this period, such as the poems by Ivan Kirillov, Afanasy Khromov, N. Petrov, S. Monokonov and V. Solovyov; the autobiographical story by N. Lamatkanov, *Kachona*, an autobiographical novel by P. Savin, *The Second Birth*, and a story by G. Konenkov *Alena Uvachan’s Family* (Seredkina 2018, 620). Under the Russification policy, the spread of Russian masterpieces and their translation into Evenki was deeply supported by the Soviet authorities. Particular attention was paid to the classic works by Pushkin, Tolstoy, Gorky, Barto, and Marshak. Although the data available are not very precise, on the basis of the

UNESCO criteria, the nature of documentation can be defined as ‘inadequate,’ equal to grade 1, as most of the texts and material available in that period were in Russian (UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment 2003, 16).

Since the collapse of the Union, the material for education in Evenki has remained quite scarce and ineffective. Among the most important and relatively recent works, there is the Russian-Evenki dictionary published by Boldyrev in 1994 and the work *The Voice, Aspect, Tense, in Tungus Languages* by Nedjalkov in 1992. Furthermore, the available pedagogic material in Evenki is only suitable for people who already have a background knowledge of the language.

‘ “We do not have a methodology of teaching the Evenki. When I came to the school, I did not have any methodological plan. The materials we are supposed to use are out-of-date and do not fit to the current situation simply because they are designed for pupils whose mother tongue is Evenki. Presently no child speaks Evenki. We have to create our own teaching materials and plan (Informant J) ” ’ (Sivtseva 2015, 72).

Nowadays, the teaching of this language should be the core subject in ethnic schools in Yakutia, in the capital of this Republic, and in some settlements of Evenks, but actually all the classes are taken in Russian, as most of the teachers do not know the local language properly (Sivtseva 2015, 71). In Chapo-Ologo, in Transbaikalia Russia, there is only one elementary school in which Evenki is taught from the 1st to the 3rd grade; after that, the compulsory education is in Russian²¹ (Slin’kova 2004). In this case, it is hard to determine an exact grade for this factor; however, considering that ‘written materials exist, but they may only be useful for some members of the community [already knowing Evenki]’ (UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment 2003, 12). The correspondent grade for the accessibility of educational material is equal to 2.

However, today it is possible to find some online sources that should guide in the acquisition of the language. In particular, there is the Evenki website <http://www.evenkitek.ru/languages/evenki/>, which is a digital library including conversation guides, textbooks, and dictionaries, and the Russian one [evenkitek.ru](http://www.evenkitek.ru/), where epic tales in Evenki are collected. The nature of documentation can be defined in this case as ‘fragmentary,’ equal to grade 2. ‘There are some grammatical sketches, word-lists, and texts useful for limited linguistic research but with inadequate coverage. Audio and video

²¹ See Evenkitek <http://www.evenkitek.ru/stellages/ethnography/evenki-zabaykalya/> for the full text

recordings may exist [...]’ (UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment 2003, 16). The data I collected did not mention specific information on the quality of the documentation.

Thus, both the education material and the documentation available in Evenki were prosperous in the early Soviet period; on the contrary, during the Russification, most of the educational sources were available in Russian as were most literary works circulating in that period. From *perestroika* until today, I did not find a remarkable growth in the publication of scholastic material in Evenki as well as of written documentation in general, as both of them remain quite limited.

4.6 Community Members’ Attitudes toward Their Own Language

Another fundamental factor determining the linguistic vitality over time is the community members’ attitude toward their own language. Regarding the data belonging to the early Soviet period, there are not many sources explaining exhaustively how Evenks perceived their language. However, in her research on the culture and folklore of this group, Anna Myreeva mentions a very interesting example. While she was in Yakutia, she met Nukuchan, one of the greatest and probably the last singer of Nimgakan, the Evenki heroic epos. He was born in the second half of the ’30s. They had been working together for over ten years. The first time she went to Kutana for four weeks, he dictated her the epos, although it was not possible to write down the whole work in only a few weeks. So, Nukushan told her: ‘ ‘I can write, I learned how to read and write in *likbez* (liquidation of illiteracy), I will try to write down the rest of the epos’’ ’ (Sivtseva 2015, 18). The transmission of epic tradition into written Evenki was essential to maintain the cultural spirit of this group. After several months, she received two big notebooks with the rest of the epos written in Evenki, in both Latin and Cyrillic scripts. Although it is clearly not possible to generalise on the basis of the story, I found it anyway significant that this man, born in the late ’30s, put effort into noting down the epos, marking the importance of transferring his own culture through the language. In this case, it is hard to evaluate exactly the attitude of the community’s speakers towards the language according to the UNESCO ranks.

With the beginning of Russification, my data reveal that the Evenks’ attitude towards their language was not very positive. Possibly, the way Russians presented themselves to the indigenous populations deeply influenced the perception of the local languages. When Russians reached the Siberian territories, they portrayed themselves as the ‘cultured people,’ bearers and spreaders of civilization; on the contrary, the indigenous were depicted and

considered as ‘low barbarians,’ (Slezkine 1994, 309), ‘aliens,’ and ‘backward creatures’. The way of portraying Russian culture as the ‘enlightened one’ led the Evenks, and in particular the young generations, to glimpse in the Russification an opportunity to improve their life conditions. Many of them preferred to study Russian and to accept the new Soviet way of life, hoping that proficiency in the new language would have guaranteed them a higher social status. The following table shows how in the course of time, especially in 1970 and 1979, the fluency in Russian sharply increased and the fluency in Evenki drastically decreased: the proficiency in Evenki lowered by almost 10%, while that in Russian increased from 71.4% to 75.2%. Furthermore, from 1959 to 1979, the amount of Evenki native speakers decreased from 55.9% to 42.8% and the amount of Russian native speakers increased from 8.7% to 20.7% (Atknine 1997, 119). At the end of the ’50s, ‘*many* members support language maintenance; others are indifferent or may even support language loss’ (UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment 2003, 15); thus the attitude of communities corresponds to grade 3. By the end of the ’70s, ‘*some* members support language maintenance; others are indifferent or may even support language loss’ (UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment 2003, 15). According to UNESCO, the rank corresponds to 2.

Census	1959	1970	1979	1989
Evenki Native	55.9%	51.3%	42.8%	29.5%
Russian Native	8.7%	16.5%	20.7%	29.1%
Other Native	35.5%	32.2%	36.5%	41.4%
Evenki Second		4.6%	2.3%	
Russian Second		54.9%	54.4%	
Evenki Fluent		55.9%	45.1%	
Russian Fluent		71.4%	75.2%	

Table 2. The percentual proportions of Evenki and Russian as the first and second languages of ethnic Evenks in Russia (Atknine 1997, 119).

My research confirms that even in the post-Soviet era, most of the Evenks still see Russian as the ‘language of possibilities.’ From their teenage years, many students think ‘that the Evenki language possesses a lower status in society in comparison with Russian and English’ (Mamontova 2014, 42). The local language is, indeed, considered the one spoken by the elder generations or by reindeer herders. In some interviews I found, several graduates from Tura boarding school state that the local language is not popular at all among the groups speaking Russian. Some students, indeed, declare:

'Yes, many are even embarrassed to speak the Evenki language. For example, many here have even come from settlements, they know the language, but they're embarrassed. They feel like if you're going someplace, they're excluded. (PMA 2011-1a)' (Mamontova 2014, 42).

Still, most of the parents are convinced that proficiency in Russian ensures a good professional future to their children:

'In our time I want for them (the children) to have a good mastery of the Russian language or even be fluent in it. Because you can have different levels of mastery of Russian. You can know the common words, you can communicate as I'm doing with you here, touch on some topic, discuss something. Even discuss problems at an administrative level. Someone entering into a new life needs to be able to explain himself to a supervisor, to a government official, to learn the conditions for getting accepted into higher education. . . . Our graduates need to know how to be able to speak. (PMA 2012-1b)' (Mamontova 2014, 42)

Moreover, today only 12.5% of 30,400 Evenks speaks the local language, as indicated above. Thus, the general tendency of speakers encourages the usage of the dominant language and supports the local language's loss. In this case, the rank is 1 (UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment 2003, 15).

On the basis of the available data, it seems that the attitude of the Evenks toward their language appeared to be positive in the early Soviet Union when, according to Sivtseva's data, it represented the bearer of local culture. On the contrary, at the peak of Russification, Evenks' perception of their language radically changed. Both in the Soviet past and in the present day, Russian is perceived as the essential tool to ensure a better future and social position compared to those that Evenki may offer.

4.7 Governmental and Institutional Language Policies

Given that the language policies implemented on Evenks are one of the core points of this work and have already been analysed in the previous chapter, I will not discuss this last factor in very deep detail. I have already mentioned that the language policy undertaken in the early Soviet period was finalised to defend the international character of the Union, eluding the risk of nationalism and Chauvinism. Thus, the linguistic minorities, including Evenki, had to be protected and their development ensured. UNESCO defines this kind of approach to minority languages as ‘equal support’ corresponding to grade 5, as ‘all languages are protected by law, and the government encourages the maintenance of all languages by implementing explicit policies’ (UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment 2003, 13).

From the late '30s, the orientation of the Soviet state with respect to multilingualism radically changed. The ethnic and linguistic diversity existing in the North constituted an obstacle to the full Russification of these territories and peoples. Thus, Russian had been the official language in the Soviet Union and the only one allowed in the social, political, economic, and educational sphere. In the context of this policy, the usage of Evenki as a language of daily communication declined. In this case, UNESCO talks about ‘forced assimilation’ equal to grade 1, because ‘the government has an explicit language policy declaring the dominant group’s language to be the only official national language, while the languages of subordinate groups are neither recognized nor supported’ (UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment 2003, 14).

In the post-Soviet period, the attitude of the Russian government has evidently changed. In the previous section, I have mentioned that the 1993 Constitution of the Russian Federation states that the government has to preserve the linguistic minorities, creating favorable conditions for their learning and usage. In terms of local legislative measures, I also referred to the Law on Languages in the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) approved in 1992. It stresses the importance of a system for developing and encouraging the use of the local languages, including Evenki. Formulated on the basis of the ‘Conception and state programme of renewal and development of national schools in the Sakha Republic,’ it aimed at the development and preservation of national cultures in the Republic (Robbek 1998, 118). However, I have also stated the law approved in 2005 by the Russian government, the Law on the State Language of the Russian Federation. It establishes Russian as the national language within the Federation and it also clarifies the domains in which it has to be used, which are the public, social, governmental, and educational ones. This governmental attitude

is defined by UNESCO as ‘differentiated support’-grade 4- as, ‘non-dominant languages are explicitly protected by the government, but there are clear differences in the contexts in which the dominant/official language(s) and non-dominant (protected) language(s) are used’ (UNESCO Language and Vitality 2003, 13).

There have been two other important steps taken recently for Evenki. In Russia, the government of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) has allocated 65 million rubble to finance the ethnic school (Sivtseva 2015, 73). Furthermore, Article 10 in the ‘Rights of Persons’ of the indigenous minorities also highlights that they should receive and transmit information in their native language.

4.8 Analysis of Data and Concluding Remarks

Through this analysis, I aimed to investigate the vitality of Evenki in relation to the language policies implemented in the early Soviet period, from the late 1930s to the Brezhnev era, and from *perestroika* until today. My research has shown that the vitality of this language is in direct correlation with the language policy implemented in these three phases and it is highly influenced by it. In the table below, I have summarised the results according to the UNESCO Assessment criteria.

UNESCO Factors	Early Soviet Period	Late 1930s – The Brezhnev era	<i>Perestroika</i> -Today
Intergenerational Transmission of Language	Among those generations born in the '30s, Evenki is transferred to children and used by them in everyday communication.	Definitively Endangered - grade 3. The language is not learnt as the mother tongue by children. Although parents speak their language to children, they cannot respond in Evenki.	Critically Endangered-grade 1. The language is spoken only by older generations, especially great-grandparental ones. Parental generations may understand the language, but they do not really speak it to children.

Absolute Number of Speakers and the Proportion of Speakers within the Total	Exact data are not available, although it might be thought that the majority of Evenks spoke their language before the Russification.	<p>From 1959 to 1970: Definitely Endangered - grade 3.</p> <p>End of the '70s: Severely Endangered- grade 2.</p> <p>1959: 55.9% of 24,710</p> <p>1970: 51.3% of 25,149</p> <p>1979: 42.8% of 27,294</p>	<p>Critically Endangered - grade 1</p> <p>1989: 30.2% of 30,233</p> <p>1998: 33.33% of 30,000</p> <p>2002: 12.89% of 35,527</p> <p>2010: 12.50% of 38,400</p>
Trends in Domains of Language Use	Dwindling Domains- grade 3 Evenki is perceived as the language of this group's culture and of everyday communication.	Limited Domains- grade 2 Loss of Evenki active use and the dominant language (Russian) begins to penetrate home domains.	Highly Limited Domains- grade 1 Evenki has no practical use and it is spoken only by elder generations.
Response to New Domains and Media	<p>Coping- grade 2</p> <p>The language is used only in few domains (in this case, in the press).</p> <p>The publication of local languages was warmly encouraged by the government.</p>	<p>Minimal- grade 1</p> <p>Evenki is not used in any official domains and it is replaced by Russian.</p>	<p>Receptive- grade 3</p> <p>The language is used in many new domains (journals, radio, TV, Apps, social platforms, and online website), but the number of users is very low and their coverage is also very limited.</p> <p>Few newspapers are available in Evenki.</p>

Availability for Language Education and Literacy	Grade 4 Availability of dictionaries, textbooks, and primers. Children were exposed to education in Evenki.	Grade 1 Most of the pedagogical material is in Russian, especially in the boarding schools. Practical orthography in the language was still known. Few sources available in Evenki.	Grade 2 Limited pedagogical sources in Evenki and adequate only for those who already have a basic knowledge of the language. Limited amount of printed material in Evenki.
Amount and Quality of Documentation	Fair- grade 3 There is an adequate number of texts on the language, dictionaries, and literary works.	Inadequate- grade 1 Most of the available texts in that period were in Russian.	Fragmentary- grade 2 Although there are some grammatical sources and texts in Evenki, their coverage is rather limited. There are audio and video recordings in this language in varying quality.
Governmental and Institutional Language Policies	Equal Support- Grade 5 Language policy focused on protecting and developing the linguistic diversity.	Forced Assimilation- Grade 1 Russification policy aiming at prioritising Russian language and culture. Evenki as a minority language is neither recognised nor protected.	Differentiated Support- Grade 4 Linguistic legislations recognise linguistic minorities and protect them, but they clearly regulate the domains in which they can-or cannot-be used.
Community Members' Attitude Toward their own Language	Support of Evenki, seen as the bearer of local culture.	Grade 3 at the end of the '50s; Grade 2 at the end of the '70s. Support of language shift. Evenki is not	Grade 1 Evenki knowledge does not guarantee a higher social position nor a

		considered as useful as Russian in order to improve social status.	better future. It is considered useless.
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In the early Soviet period, when the policy of indigenisation and development of linguistic minorities was applied, Evenki could still be considered a vital language. Based on the UNESCO criteria, indeed, the grades for each factor range from 5 to 3, excepted for the response to new media which was equal to 2. In this period, the language was still spoken by people in daily communication and transferred to young generations. Although the exact data are not available, it would seem that this language was also spoken by most of the Evenks and that it was perceived as the bearer of local culture and traditions. Even though the domains in which it was used were not that many, the Soviet legislative measures encouraged the growth of native presses, the circulation of local journals and of written documentation. In order to facilitate the literacy process, the production of pedagogical material was also supported.

In the years between the late '30s and the Brezhnev era, the status of Evenki appears to be different. This phase was characterised by a process of aggressive Russification to prioritise Russian language and culture over the indigenous ones. In parallel with the application of this policy, the estimated grades of endangerment are from 3 to 1, indicating a lower level of vitality in comparison with the one estimated in the early Soviet period. The language was no longer learnt as first language by children at home and the number of speakers gradually declined. The material available in this language became gradually limited, being substituted by a large number of sources in Russian in order to facilitate its acquisition and, thus, the spread of Communist principles. Consistent with the new educational plans in the boarding schools, most of the pedagogical material had to be in Russian. The official recognition of Russian as the only national language implied the gradual loss of Evenki as the language of communication. Furthermore, most Evenks saw the knowledge of the new national language as an indispensable tool to heighten their social position and to have a prosperous future.

In the third phase of language policy, the status of Evenki appears further different. During *perestroika* and after the collapse of the Soviet regime, the legislative measures were supposed to protect the linguistic minorities. Nevertheless, the vitality assessment does not show positive results. The majority of the UNESCO grades of endangerment are equal to 1, indicating that the language is almost completely lost. Evenki, indeed, is basically not

transmitted anymore to the young generations nor used in daily communication, and this explains why the level of speakers from 1989 to 2010 kept on decreasing. In terms of available sources in this language, there are few newspapers published and even the response to new media is still very scarce. Moreover, although the legislative measures encourage the teaching and the learning of Evenki, the pedagogical material available is not enough nor qualitatively adequate. It is interesting to notice then, that even though the language policy was oriented in recent decades to the protection of minorities, Evenki cannot be considered a vital language. There are several reasons explaining this point.

First of all, the policy of Russification has lasted for over fifty years, in which Evenki and all the indigenous groups were not allowed to speak any other language but Russian; it is therefore not surprising that at the present stage, Evenki is classified as endangered.

Furthermore, the legislative measures taken in the last few decades might appear in theory stimulating and aimed at minority languages' protection, but in practice, they should be further improved. Grenoble and Whaley conducted research on the Evenks living in the Sakha Republic (Yakutia). They reveal that the legislative measures for saving this language are hindered 'by confusion of the roles of the federal government, the regional government, and the local community' (Grenoble and Whaley 2006, 76) therefore demonstrating scarce effectiveness. This aspect is actually a legacy of the Soviet era, when the federal government had control over every aspect of life. Section 1, Article 68 of the 1993 Russian Federation Constitution establishes Russian as the official language of the Federation and of all its territories. Each Republic has the right to instate its official language which has to be used alongside Russian in administrative and state business. In Section 3, it is mentioned that '“The Russian Federation guarantees all its people the right to the preservation of [their] native languages, and to the creation of conditions for its study and development”' (Grenoble and Whaley 2006, 76). The Law on the Education in Russia allows the citizens to acquire native-language education and to choose it; furthermore, it also highlights that the State has specific responsibilities in training competent specialists in those languages which do not have their own government. This division of responsibilities is actually clear only on paper; in reality, it is quite blurred. The Sakha Republic being part of the Russian Federation, residents still have to learn Russian as the national language. In theory, the Republic has the authority over education in its own regional language, Sakha. 'This leaves the education of Evenki, in Evenki, to the local communities for children, in day-care centers and in the schools. The federal government technically oversees programs in higher education aimed at training teachers and other professionals, [...] but provides little oversight and few resources (Grenoble and Whaley 2006, 76). Thus, even though the attitude of the Russian

government has become more flexible than in the past and inclined to the revitalisation of indigenous languages, in practice there is no clear perception of those responsibilities belonging to the federal government and those belonging to the local ones. This, as in the case of the Evenks, facilitates neither the correct implementation of the law nor its effectiveness.

Moreover, the example of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) highlights another aspect explaining the scarce effectiveness of the current policy. In this territory, according to the law, the state languages are Russian and Yakut, alongside Even, Evenki, Dolgan, Chukchi and Yukaghir. Thus, they are all under the protection of the legislation. The problem is that ‘when laws do not oblige, but they only "allow" and the languages are used within the "limits of opportunities," then the impact of legislation remains insignificant’ (Bang 2015, 59).²² In this sense, Püyükö highlights that the laws still have a symbolic value and they have a very limited effect. More attention is probably needed to develop a much more effective education programme, especially in Evenki and in all the other minority languages within the Republic. In 2000, for instance, there were only two pre-school educational institutions providing training programmes in minority languages. Equally important should be the usage of the languages in the official spheres. ‘It was alarming to note that for languages of indigenous peoples, there are not the same extensive and already implemented plans for the Yakut language to improve the safety of the language’²³ (Bang 2015, 60).

Some limits can also be found in the federal legislation applied today. The 2005 Law on the State Language of the Russian Federation highlights that Russian remains the official language of interethnic communication and its knowledge and usage are compulsory basically in the whole Federation. To some extent, this law can indeed be defined as ‘a patriotic utterance’ (Lunde 2017, 152), where the focus is not the preservation of endangered languages and linguistic rights; rather, it puts evident emphasis on matters regarding the standardization, norms, and functional realms of Russian itself. This point finds confirmation in Vladimir Putin’s recent speech at the Council for Interethnic Relations and Council for the Russian Language, where the President describes Russian as the language-symbol of state unity:

²² This is my own translation from Russian into English. Here below, the original text:

‘Проблема состоит в том, что, когда законы не обязывают, а они только «позволяют» и языки употребляются в «пределах возможностей», то тогда влияние законодательства остаётся незначительным’ (Bang 2015, 59).

²³ This is my own translation from Russian into English. Here below, the original text:

‘Но, тревожно было заметить, что для языков КМНС не существуют такие же обширные и уже выполненные планы как для якутского языка на улучшение сохранности языка [...]’ (Bang 2015, 60).

‘At the same time, we have to understand that our informational, cultural and state unity, the unity of the Russian people directly depends on how well our young people master the Russian language, on its status and spread.

Russian is the country’s state language, the language of interethnic communication. More than 96 percent of our citizens speak Russian. It was the Russian language along with the Russian culture that formed Russia as a single multi-ethnic civilisation, for centuries maintaining ties between generations, the continuity and mutual enrichment of various ethnic cultures’ (Putin 2015 in the Council for Interethnic Relations and the Council for the Russian Language)²⁴.

Thus, the current language policy of the Russian Federation once again strengthens the importance of the state language in comparison with the minority ones and pushes for its knowledge in the whole Federation.

‘The ability to freely and properly use the Russian language opened up greater opportunities for representatives of any nationality in terms of using their potential, getting an education and achieving professional success. The state has to constantly improve the quality of Russian language teaching for our children regardless of where they live or what type of school they go to’ (Putin 2015 in the Council for Interethnic Relations and the Council for the Russian Language)²⁵.

Furthermore, the recent attitude of the Russian president seems to give a quite positive image of the minority languages’ status, which does not completely mirror the real circumstances. In the Meeting of the Council for Interethnic Relations and the Council for the Russian Language, Putin stresses that ‘this country [Russia] is home to 193 ethnic groups and nationalities speaking almost 300 languages and dialects’ (Putin, 2015 in the Council for Interethnic Relations and the Council for the Russian Language)²⁶. Unfortunately, this statement does not completely reflect the real linguistic situation, considering that most of the national languages show a low level of vitality. This is, indeed, not only the case of Evenki, but of most of the Northern languages. Considering the data available on the Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger of 2010, most of the linguistic minorities existing within

²⁴ See <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/49491> for the full discourse

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

the Russian Federation are classified either as severely endangered (marked by the orange spot) or as critically endangered (marked by the red spot).

Map 1 Arctic Circumpolar

Ahtna (USA) 🔴	Forest Yukagir (RUS) 🔴	Nisga'a (CAN) 🔴	Skolt Saami (FIN; NOR; RUS) 🔴
Ainu (3) (JPN; RUS) 🔴	Gitksan (CAN) 🔴	Nivkh (2) (RUS) 🔴	South Slavey (CAN) 🔴
Aivilingmiutut (CAN) 🔴	Gwich'in (2) (CAN; USA) 🔴	North Alaskan Inupiaq (3) (CAN; USA) 🔴	Southern Haida (CAN) 🔴
Akkala Saami (RUS) 🔴	Haisla (CAN) 🔴	North Greenlandic (GRL) 🔴	Southern Tutchone (CAN) 🔴
Aleut (3) (RUS; USA) 🔴	Han (2) (CAN; USA) 🔴	North Saami (FIN; NOR; RUS; SWE) 🔴	Tagish (CAN) 🔴
Alutor (RUS) 🔴	Holikachuk (USA) 🔴	Northern Haida (CAN; USA) 🔴	Tahltan (CAN) 🔴
Arman (RUS) 🔴	Inari Saami (FIN) 🔴	Northern Selkup (RUS) 🔴	Tanacross (USA) 🔴
Baraba Tatar (RUS) 🔴	Ingalik (USA) 🔴	Northern Tutchone (CAN) 🔴	Tanaina (USA) 🔴
Carrier (CAN) 🔴	Inuinnaqtun (CAN) 🔴	Nunatsiavummiutut (CAN) 🔴	Tanana (USA) 🔴
Central Alaskan Yupik (2) (USA) 🔴	Itelmen (RUS) 🔴	Nunavimmiutut (CAN) 🔴	Ter Saami (RUS) 🔴
Central Siberian Yupik (2) (RUS; USA) 🔴	Kaska (CAN) 🔴	Old Sirenik (RUS) 🔴	Tlingit (2) (CAN; USA) 🔴
Chukchi (RUS) 🔴	Kerek (RUS) 🔴	Oroch (RUS) 🔴	Tsetsaut (CAN) 🔴
Chulym Turk (RUS) 🔴	Kildin Saami (RUS) 🔴	Orok (RUS) 🔴	Tsimshian (CAN) 🔴
Copper Island Aleut (RUS) 🔴	Kili (RUS) 🔴	Pacific Gulf Yupik (USA) 🔴	Tundra Enets (RUS) 🔴
Dogrib (CAN) 🔴	Kivallirmiutut (CAN) 🔴	Pite Saami (NOR; SWE) 🔴	Tundra Nenets (RUS) 🔴
Dolgan (RUS) 🔴	Koryak (RUS) 🔴	Qikiqtaaluk nigiani (CAN) 🔴	Tundra Yukagir (RUS) 🔴
East Cape Yupik (RUS) 🔴	Koyukon (USA) 🔴	Qikiqtaaluk uannangani (CAN) 🔴	Udege (RUS) 🔴
East Greenlandic (GRL) 🔴	Lule Saami (NOR; SWE) 🔴	Rigolet Inuktitut (CAN) 🔴	Ulcha (RUS) 🔴
Even (2) (RUS) 🔴	Michif (CAN) 🔴	Seward Peninsula Inupiaq (4) (RUS; USA) 🔴	Ume Saami (SWE) 🔴
Evenki (RUS) 🔴	Nanay (CHN; RUS) 🔴	Siglitun (CAN) 🔴	Upper Kuskokwim (USA) 🔴
Eyak (USA) 🔴	Naskapi (CAN) 🔴		Upper Tanana (CAN; USA) 🔴
Forest Enets (RUS) 🔴	Natsilingmiutut (CAN) 🔴		West Greenlandic (GRL) 🔴
	Negidal (RUS) 🔴		Yakut (RUS) 🔴
	Nganasan (RUS) 🔴		

Figure 1. *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger* (*Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger of 2010*)

Another factor I consider crucial is Evenki speakers' attitude in relation to the contemporary linguistic policies. In the case of the Sakha Republic, the general attitude of local languages' speakers, including the Evenks, appears to be quite indifferent to the new regulations. The majority of the rural population indeed opts for learning and speaking the national languages- Sakha and Russian- considering the local ones useless and impossible to save (Robbek 1998, 120). Furthermore, young people show particular interest in learning international languages, such as Russian and English, rather than a local language like Evenki, which does not have any practical use and which is spoken only by elder generations' representatives (Grenoble and Whaley 2006, 78).

In all three phases of time, I observed a direct correlation between the implemented language policies and the vitality of Evenki. Basing my analysis on UNESCO criteria, I observed that in the early Soviet period, when the legislations left more margin for development, the language could still be considered vital; on the contrary, at the peak of Russification, Evenki was subject to an evident decline in terms of active usage and, thus, of vitality. From *perestroika* to the present, the legislation has officially encouraged the development of this language-and of minorities in general; nonetheless, the concrete

application should be drastically improved; thus, even in the third phase, Evenki cannot be considered a vital language.

Conclusion

This research focused on the relationship between linguistic policies and language vitality in relation to Evenki and the Evenks. I chose this as a case study, because I have noticed that the majority of the existing literature on this group focuses on pure linguistic analysis, investigating the dialects' classification, the morphology, the influence that other languages- including Russian- had on it. My diachronic-descriptive analysis provides a comprehensive overview on Evenki from the early 1920s to the present time, adding a new glimpse into its vitality in the past and in the contemporary era.

In this discussion, I reconstructed the status of this language according to a diachronic perspective, analysing it in the early Soviet phase, from the late 1930s to the Brezhnev era, and from *perestroika* until today. The discussion in the main body was structured into four main sections. Firstly, I presented the Evenks, giving an overview of their history, habitat, economy, and language; the next section provided the reader with the theoretical background, explaining the concepts of 'language policies' and 'language vitality.' In the third part, I reconstructed the language policy implemented on the Siberian peoples- specifically on the Evenks- from the '20s to the contemporary era. I structured this discussion in three different parts, clarifying the linguistic measures taken in these stages. Then, in the last section, I took into account the nine UNESCO factors, in order to see to what extent these policies influenced the vitality of Evenki.

The results of my research clearly show how, in the case of Evenki, the language policy did affect the linguistic vitality. I highlighted that in the early Soviet period, when the policy of *korenizatsiia* was applied, Evenki could still be considered a vital language. Then, from the late '30s to the Brezhnev era, Evenki- as well as the majority of the indigenous languages- was displaced by Russian and, indeed, the loss of vitality can be detected. In the years of *perestroika* and in the post-Soviet era, the main tendencies of governments were generally oriented to protect and to revitalise these minorities. Contrary to normal expectations, Evenki cannot be considered a vital language. I highlighted, indeed, that these legislative measures seem to be still oriented in strengthening the role of Russian as the interethnic communication language, state unity, and civilisation. Furthermore, I also remarked some issues regarding their implementation. So, even in this case, the correlation between linguistic policies and language vitality is confirmed.

Nonetheless, language policy is just one of the several features influencing language status. Among the others, education policies, federal support, regional autonomy, and human and financial resources can be mentioned. Moreover, considering that I investigated only

one case study, it could be possible that, applying the same methodological approach to another Siberian group, the outcomes might be different from those exposed in this discussion.

In terms of sources, I structured the discussion on the basis of the available data being aware that, in some cases, they were quite limited. Nonetheless, it is in my plan to develop this research in greater depth, possibly adding a comparison with another minority group, having available much more time and possibilities to look for more data and to collect them.

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