

The viability of Evenki

AND THE INFLUENCE OF LANGUAGE POLICY IN THE USSR AND THE PRC

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Master thesis: The viability of Evenki and the influence of language policy in the USSR and PRC

Master's programme: Russian and Eurasian Studies
European credits: 20 ECTS
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Turn in date:
18 July 2016

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Introduction

The North of Siberia is the homeland of many different minorities of which the Evenks are one of the most numerous and widespread of the indigenous Northern Siberian peoples. They are even the most numerous when the Evenks in China are also considered.¹ Evenks can be found through almost all of Siberia (Russia), China and Mongolia and have an ethnic population of approximately 69,900 people in three countries.² The greatest number of Evenks lives in Siberia, a total of 38,400 according to the 2010 census. In the year 2010 approximately 30,875 of the Evenk ethnic population lived in China, according to that year's census.³ Mongolia has the smallest number of ethnic Evenks inside its borders, only approximately 1,000 Evenks were counted in a 1992 counting.⁴ No new census available for Mongolia. The Evenks, also called Ewenks, Ewenke or Tungus⁵, are a nomadic reindeer people who traditionally lived as reindeer herders, hunters and fishermen. Nowadays several groups of Evenks still live the traditional nomadic way, although some of them have found a permanent place to live.⁶

Evenks are believed to have their original homeland in Transbaikal during the Neolithic period.⁷ After several migrations in the following centuries, they spread across China and Russia and they have been living in both Russia and China for centuries. This spread of Evenks over both China and Russia was a result of the nomadic way of life, voluntary migrations and forced migrations. For example, in the 17th century the ancestors of the modern Solon Ewenks were moved from the Middle Amur region to Central Manchuria in China, by the Chinese government. During the 19th century a group of Siberian Evenks, also known as Manchurian Reindeer Tungus, crossed the Russian-Chinese border. Nowadays their descendants still live in China. After the Russian October Revolution in 1917 a group of Evenks, Khamnigan, more specifically, the Tungus Ewenke, migrated to China.⁸ The Evenks came to live in two different countries, while they became separated by state borders.

¹ V. Atknine, 'The Evenki language from the Yenisei to Sakhalin', *Senri Ethnological Studies*, Vol. 44 (1997) 109-121, 109.

² Ethnologue *Evenki* SIL International Publications (2016). From: <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/evn> (10-10-2016).

³ *The Ewenki ethnic group* China Daily (15-10-2013). From: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2013-10/15/content_17032505.htm (9-7-2016).

⁴ Ethnologue *Evenki* SIL International Publications (2016). From: <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/evn> (10-10-2016).

⁵ Ewenke or Ewenki is used in China to designate Evenks. The difference in orthography between Evenki/Evenks and Ewenki/Ewenke is generally explained by the problems with translating the word, since the sound of the English letter 'V' does not exist in Chinese. Tungus is the historical name for Evenks.

⁶ L.A., Grenoble and L.J. Whaley, 'Language policy and the loss of Tungusic languages', *Language & Communication* (1999) 373-386, 374.

⁷ Atknine, 'The Evenki language from Yenisei to Sakhalin', 109.

⁸ J. Janhunen, 'Tungusic an endangered language family in Northeast Asia', *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* Vol. 173 (2005) 37-54, 40.

Both countries underwent significant political changes of which some influenced the Evenk peoples, especially during the twentieth century. Important political decisions concerning the Evenks, like minority language policy, in the Soviet Union (USSR) and the People's Republic of China (PRC) have been made. Language policy is deployed in order to promote or regulate the use of languages. Language policy can have both a positive and a negative impact on languages, depending on the measures taken and to what extent the language receives positive attitudes. Evenks in China and Russia both had to deal with language policy. Since language policy can have both positive and negative effects on the maintenance of a language, it is interesting to look at the language policy of both countries and its effect on Evenki and its viability. Therefore, the question of this research is how the language policy in Soviet Russia and Communist China has influenced the viability of the Evenki language in both countries. The research will mainly focus on the communist period during the twentieth century and will be divided in five parts. The first chapter will contain an overview of the historical background of the Evenk people and the migrations towards China. A short outline of the linguistic situation will also be part of this chapter. The second chapter contains a theoretical framework about language policy. Important definitions and theories will be discussed in order to create a frame for this research. This chapter will further discuss the use of language policy and how it can affect the survival of languages. UNESCO definitions about language vitality and the domains in which this is measured will be further explained, in order to the methods for the research in the following chapters. The following chapter will discuss and compare the language policy in respectively the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. The fourth chapter will concern the contemporary situation and viability of the Evenki language in both countries according to the UNESCO factors of vitality. The last chapter will concern the effects of both language policies and addresses the issue of to what extent the current language situation, vitality and viability of the language is a result of the language policies. Finally, conclusions will be draw on the influence of the language policy on the viability of Evenki in Russia and China, using the vitality factors from UNESCO.

There has been a large amount of research about Evenks in both China and Russia. The main focus of this research is Evenki in Russia or Evenki in China. Although there has been research on the language use and the language policy on Evenki in both countries, they are rarely placed in a comparative context. Therefore, the importance of this research is the comparison between the language policy applied on Evenki in both countries. It is an attempt to look into the subject in a comparative way, in order to come to a new conclusion about the consequences of language policy on Evenki, in Russia and China.

The comparison is valuable because the Evenks in China and Russia have the same ancestors and are considered to be one people. Most scholars mention the other Evenk group across the border during their research. They are a minority group with a minority language in both countries, in the past and now. The language is the same in Russia and China although the written form of Evenki, established in the Soviet Union, is not used in both countries. The research for the effect of language policy on Evenki is even more useful because both countries had a communist regime during a great part of the twentieth century, based on the Leninist-Stalinist principle. Both the Soviet Union and Communist China had launched a language policy and had to deal with many minority groups within their borders. They successfully eliminated illiteracy, introduced anti-religious persecution and promoted sedentary living.⁹ The politics of both the Soviet Union and Communist China influenced major markers of Evenk identity like religion, language and the traditional way of living. Even though there were similarities where the general ideas of communism were concerned, both Communist China and the Soviet Union did draw up this language policy in their own way, especially after the schism between the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union from until 1956, which became official after 1961. The scission between China and the Soviet Union eventually led to another way of communism, which makes the comparison between the Evenks on both sides of the state borders even more interesting.

⁹ Grenoble, 'Language policy and the loss of Tungusic languages', 373.

1. Historical and linguistic background

Evenks are one of the twenty-six ethnic groups living in Siberia who traditionally live from hunting, reindeer herding and fishing. They are called the ‘peoples of the north’, ‘small peoples’ or ‘indigenous northerners’.¹⁰ Although the Evenks are believed to have their origin in what is now called Russia, they are nowadays also living in China and Mongolia, though the majority lives in either China or Russia. They are historically known as the Tungus, and the Evenki language belongs to the Tungusic language family.¹¹ The history of the Evenk people and their language goes back far. They have inhabited the area of Siberia for centuries. This chapter will give a historical background on the Evenk people, their history and migrations until the twentieth century. The second part of this chapter will give an overview of the linguistic background.

History of the Evenks

The idea of a Northern Tungusic homeland is a generally accepted view under researchers. This is supported by Janhunen in *Manchuria an ethnic history* and Victor Atknine in his article ‘The Evenki language from the Yenisei to Sakhalin’.¹² The geographical location however, remains a point of discussion.¹³ The origin of the Evenks and other Northern Tungusic people has two different hypotheses where the original homeland and ethnic relationships are concerned. According to one theory the homeland of the Evenks is to be found to the east of Lake Baikal.¹⁴ Their origin in the Siberian Transbaikalia region¹⁵ can be dated back to the Neolithic period¹⁶, when the Northern Tungusic Neolithic hunters moved to the mountainous Transbaikalia region, near to Lake Baikal, although it is not clear where they came from before moving to this region.¹⁷ In the period of 500 AD the arrival of Turkic groups on the shores of Lake Baikal split the ancestors of the Northern Tungus. Their migration to the north initiated the formation of the Evenks without contact with the Tungusic-speaking groups from the Lower Amur. The period that followed, was characterised by an Evenk migration towards the east.¹⁸ Besides the idea of

¹⁰ Y. Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors* (New York 1994) 1.

¹¹ L.J. Whaley, L.A. Grenoble, F. Li, ‘Revisiting Tungusic classification from the bottom up: A Comparison of Evenki and Oroqen’, *Language*, Vol. 75, No. 2 (1999) 286-321, 309.

¹² Atknine, ‘The Evenki language from Yenisei to Sakhalin’, 109-110.

¹³ J. Janhunen, *Manchuria: An ethnic history* (1996) 168.

¹⁴ J. Forsyth, *A history of the peoples of Siberia* (1991) 52.

¹⁵ Transbaikalia, Transbaikalia, Trans-Baikal; A mountainous region to the east of Lake Baikal in Russia.

¹⁶ The Neolithic period started about 10.200 BC until ended around 4.500 – 2.000 BC.

¹⁷ B. Pakendorf, ‘Contact in the prehistory of the Sakha (Yakuts): Linguistic and genetic perspectives’, *Proefschrift Universiteit Leiden* (2007) 1-375, 15.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, 15.

a Tungusic homeland in the Siberian Transbaikal region, there is also a Manchurian alternative.¹⁹ This theory states that the ancestors of the modern Evenks moved away thousands of years ago from their previous homeland Manchuria, northeast China, and spread for thousands of miles through Mongolia and Russian Siberia.²⁰ This early period of the Evenks also marked the domestication of the reindeer, which formed the Evenk traditional way of living. Hunting and reindeer herding became the basis of the Evenk economic and traditional way of living.²¹

The further expansion of the ancestors of the Evenks to the north is more generally accepted by scholars and is assumed to have taken place around the 12th or 13th century AD.²² About these migrations little is known and written by scholars. Contact with the Russians would follow in the sixteenth century. The nowadays called Russian people had made no contact yet and only few had heard of the Siberian people, although the Russian Primary Chronicle of the 11th century contained a story about people who lived beyond high mountains ‘far in the midnight land’, who spoke an unintelligible language.²³ This story was probably about the Siberian people in general, of which the Russians knew little.

During the 16th century the Russians encountered the Evenks and they started the annexation of Siberian land. The exploration and conquest of Siberia started during the reign of Tsar Ivan the Terrible (1530-1584). This campaign eventually turned into a crusade for Orthodox Christianity amongst the Siberian peoples, including the Evenks.²⁴ The annexation of West-Siberia was completed around the year 1620 and by then the Russian dominance covered the territory from the Urals to the Yenisei valley.²⁵ The annexation of Western Siberia was followed by the Russian focus on Central and North-east Siberia during the 17th century.²⁶ From 1621 the archbishopric of Tobol’sk started with the task of bringing the Russian and therefore also Orthodox Christianity to the native Siberian peoples.²⁷

In the middle of the seventeenth century, a group of Evenks, nowadays called Solon-Ewenke in China, crossed the Amur and settled around the towns Hailar and Nantun.²⁸ These Evenks came under Chinese administration. With the Treaty of Nerchinsk in 1689 most

¹⁹ Janhunen, *Manchuria: An ethnic history*, 168-169.

²⁰ P. Vitebsky, *The reindeer people: Living with animals and spirits in Siberia* (New York 2006) 6.

²¹ Atkine, ‘The Evenki language from Yenisei to Sakhalin’, 109.

²² Pakendorf, ‘Contact in the prehistory of the Sakha’, 16.

²³ Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors*, 11,

²⁴ *Ibidem*, 42.

²⁵ Forsyth, *A history of the peoples of Siberia*, 38.

²⁶ Forsyth, *A history of the peoples of Siberia*, 48.

²⁷ Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors*, 41.

²⁸ R. Fraser, ‘Forced relocations amongst the Reindeer-Evenki of Inner Mongolia’, *Inner Asia, Vol.12* (2010) 317-345, 318.

Tungusic groups, except for most Evens and Evenks, also came under Chinese administration.²⁹ However, since one part of the treaty did not allow refugees who arrived in China or Russia before the treaty, to return to the place where they came from it is likely that some nomadic Evenks stayed within the borders of Russia or China after the treaty. In spite of the treaty, the problems with the Sino-Russian border, which was characterized by Russian invasions, went on and ended with the Treaty of Kiakhta in 1727, which effectively closed the border between Russia and China. From then onwards the upper Yenisei region south of the Sayan mountains was part of Outer Mongolia within the Chinese Empire. Only a permitted trade route was still open to pass the border.³⁰ Evenks living in the territory of Yenisei were now stuck within the Chinese borders and had to continue their nomadic way of living between these borders. It is however unclear how the border protection worked and how it was maintained. The migration of Evenks towards China did not end after this treaty. Around 1825 a group of Evenks crossed the Amur and migrated from Russian Siberia to China. Before their immigration, most of them had become Russian Orthodox Christians.³¹ They returned to their animistic worldview after the migration and until today they remain faithful to this belief. Nowadays this group of Evenks is known as Chinese Reindeer-Ewenke³². The last migration to China took place at the beginning of the twentieth century, when a group of Evenks left the Russian Chita region and migrated to Inner Mongolia in China. This group of Evenks, still living in China nowadays, are called the Tungus-Ewenke or Khamnigan.³³

The twentieth century held an alteration for China and Russia, which also had an impact on the Evenk people. The change started with the Russian Revolution in 1917, which led to the deposition of the tsar during the February Revolution, which ended the period of Imperial Russia. Communism was established after the October Revolution in 1917 by the Soviet government under Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924). The Soviet government applied a language policy, which will be further discussed in the third chapter. The Evenks living on the Russian side of the Sino-Russian border underwent the Soviet language policy and other measures like the obligatory moving to communities like *sovkhoz*³⁴ and *kolkhoz*³⁵. Since private property was

²⁹ Janhunen, 'Tungusic an endangered language', 39.

³⁰ Forsyth, *A history of the peoples of Siberia*, 95-99.

³¹ Atknine, 'The Evenki language from Yenisei to Sakhalin', 115-116.

³² Normally 'Evenki' refers to the language, while Evenk refers to the people. In the naming of this specific group of Evenks the choice was made to name them Chinese Reindeer-Evenki. They are often also called Manchurian Reindeer Ewenke.

³³ Fraser, 'Forced relocations', 318.

³⁴ State-owned farm in the Soviet Union.

³⁵ Collective farm in the Soviet Union.

not allowed, many reindeer were confiscated by the Soviets.³⁶ Many Evenks had to give up their nomadic way of life and started to live in communities. The Soviets disturbed the nomadic way of living and hunting. For some Evenks this was temporarily, but many others never went back to the traditional way of living.

From the beginning of the twentieth century China also faced profound changes. The Xinhai revolution in China led to a constitutional monarchy in 1911. In 1912 China became a republic, with Sun Yat-Sen as its first president. China was now called Republic of China. In 1943 Chiang Kai-Shek (1887-1975) became president. An ongoing civil war between Communists against Nationalists ended when Mao Zedong (1893-1976) defeated Chang Kai-Shek and the nationalists. Mao brought communism to China and changed its name from Republic of China to People's Republic of China. China's communism was for an important part based on Russian communism during the first decade.³⁷ The Soviet Union was leading the communist world and the new established People's Republic of China was led by the same ideology. The Chinese minority policy was very similar to the Soviet minority policy, which will be further explained in the third chapter. Soon the Sino-Soviet relations cooled down when Stalin refused to treat Mao as his equal.³⁸ After Stalin's death, his successor Nikita Khrushchev (1894-1971) tried to continue the bonds within the socialist sphere. Despite his efforts, the rift between both communist lands grew, partly because Khrushchev ignored Mao about important decisions where international conflicts during the Cold War period were concerned. Mao was also convinced that Khrushchev was too soft in the international Cold War conflict. Besides that, Mao disagreed with Khrushchev's destalinization in the Soviet Union, since Mao followed the Stalinist line. As a result, the Sino-Soviet relations cooled down further at the end of the 1950s.³⁹ The coming of communism to China did not only have political implications, China performed collectivisation just like the Soviet Union. In the 1960s the lives of several Evenks became organized in a collective hunting economy, modelled like the Soviet *Sovkhoz* or state farms.

The Soviet Union and China followed a different path since the end of the 1950s. They were both communist, but wanted to carry out this way of living in a very different way. This different view on communism also led to a different way of treating the subjects within their borders, in this case a different way of treating Soviet and Sino Evenks. China and Russia both

³⁶ Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors*, 132.

³⁷ J.M. Thompson, *A vision unfulfilled* (1996) 368.

³⁸ Thompson, *A vision unfulfilled*, 400.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, 402-404.

had their own form of minority and language policy. Nowadays China has three groups of Evenki speakers living within its borders: Solon Ewenke, Manchurian Reindeer Evenki (also called Manchurian Reindeer Ewenke) and Khamnigan. Solon Ewenke, Khamnigan and the Manchurian Reindeer Tungus have been Russian subjects for a long time before their ancestors migrated towards China.⁴⁰ Russia acknowledges only one group of Evenki speakers within its borders. Although it is known that Evenki in Russia has several dialects and subdialects, officially it is considered to be one language.

Linguistic background

Evenki belongs to the *Tungusic* or *Manchu-Tungus* group of languages. The *Tungusic* languages are divided in three main groups by linguists: the Manchu branch, the Amur Tungusic branch and the Northern Tungusic branch. The mutual relationship between the languages belonging to those groups was already recognised in the eighteenth century.⁴¹ The Russian ethnographer Leopold von Schrenk worked out the division of Evenki in the Tungusic group in the late nineteenth century.⁴² The publication of *Sravnitel'najafonetika tunguso-man' chzhurskixjazykov* by Vera I. Cincius in 1949 led to the classification of Northern Tungus into two groups: Evenki and Even. She further recognised five dialect groups within Evenki: Northern dialect, Southern dialect, Eastern dialect, Negidal dialect and the Solon dialect.⁴³ The debate and research about the language family went on. In 1978 the Doerfer classification appeared, which placed Evenki in the North western group and included Oroqen within the Evenki branch.⁴⁴ Although the classification matter is still not completely solved, it is generally assumed that the Evenki speakers belong to the Northern Tungusic branch and that the Russian and Chinese Evenks together form the largest group of the Northern Tungusic branch. The Northern Tungusic branch itself is also considered the largest group and is also the most widespread of the three.

Despite the fact that the language on both sides of the border is considered the same language, they appear to have many different dialects, especially in Russia, which counts fourteen dialects with more than fifty different subdialects within the Evenki language.⁴⁵ The people are however not divided in several groups, based on their dialects. Despite the different

⁴⁰ Janhunen, *Manchuria: An ethnic history*, 110.

⁴¹ Atknine, 'The Evenki language from Yenisei to Sakhalin', 111.

⁴² Whaley, 'Revisiting Tungusic classification', 289.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, 290.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, 291.

⁴⁵ Atknine, 'The Evenki language from Yenisei to Sakhalin', 116.

dialects they are officially recognised as a homogenous group; the Siberian Evenks. In China the Evenk identity is more divided than in Russia. Where Russia only has one type of Evenks, the Siberian Evenks, in China several subgroups together form the Chinese Evenk identity. In China the collective noun of the Evenk group is called Manchurian Ewenke. Several groups are counted as Evenks, namely Manchurian Reindeer Evenki (Yakut Ewenke), Solon Manchurian, Khamnigan (Tungus Ewenke) and Xinjian Ongkor Solon.⁴⁶ In contrast to Russia, the Chinese do not recognise so many dialects. The four groups of Evenks are also the four recognised Evenki dialects in China. Language is one of the major criteria for classification for the Evenk group. They are considered one people because of the shared language. In case of a wrong classification, an Evenk group with a specific dialect can be unjustly seen as another ethnic group. The classification of the language is therefore not just a linguistic concern, but also a matter of identity.

Where in Russia the group of Evenks is simply called Evenks, in China three different groups are recognised within the branch. The already mentioned Manchurian Reindeer Evenki, Solon Ewenke and Khamnigan are the three groups that are recognised by the Chinese, within the Evenk group. The Xinjian Ongkor Solon are extinct, but used to be the fourth recognised Evenk group. The biggest group is the Solon Ewenke or also called Solon Manchurian. This group accounts for approximately 80 percent of the complete Evenk group, according to the 1990 census, which is the latest available counting of Solon Ewenke. They live in several so called banners⁴⁷, the Morindawa, Arong and Oroqen Banners in the Inner Mongolia region, but also in the Nehe County in the Heilongjiang region. Map 1 shows the regions Heilongjiang and Inner Mongolia in the Northeast of China.⁴⁸ They live among several groups, like Oroqen, Mongols and Daur.⁴⁹ The Solon Ewenke are sometimes approached as a different subethnic group included in the Evenk group.⁵⁰ Scholars like Juha Janhunen state that the Solon Ewenke are culturally and linguistically more different from the Evenks than Oroqen, which is considered to be a different ethnic group. According to him the groups Solon Ewenke, Manchurian Reindeer-Evenki and the Khamnigan should not even considered to be one

⁴⁶ Janhunen, 'Tungusic an endangered language', 39.

⁴⁷ A banner used to be an administrative division of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region in the People's Republic of China. First used during the Qing Dynasty. Nowadays a county level division in the Chinese administrative hierarchy, 49 banners in total.

⁴⁸ R.L. Langill *Chinese Province/Cities Map* History of Chinese and Japanese Civilization Maps. From: http://homepages.stmartin.edu/Fac_Staff/rlangill/HIS%20217/HIS%20217%20Maps.htm (10-6-2016).

⁴⁹ Hattaway *Ewenki Tungus in China* Joshua Project (2016). From: https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/18453/CH (10-12-2015).

⁵⁰ Janhunen, *Manchuria: An ethnic history*, 67.

coherent nationality.⁵¹ Khamnigan speak an Evenki dialect which is, according to Janhunen, not identical to the Evenki that is nowadays spoken by other Evenks in China and Russia. They even speak two dialects, Khamnigan Evenki and Khamnigan Mongol.⁵² Janhunen is convinced that Solon should be a separate ethnic minority, with its own registered language. He attributes the unification to bureaucratic reasons, which he does not further explain.⁵³ He further distinguishes roughly two types of dialects, Siberian Evenki and Manchurian Evenki.⁵⁴ Other scholars have different ideas about the different groups in the Evenki language in China. Scholar Xi Zhang for example, writes in *Vowel systems of the Manchu Tungus languages of China* that Evenki in Russia is different than Ewenki⁵⁵ in China.

Whether one supports the idea that Ewenki and Evenki are not the same language or that the difference is just a matter of classification and considers Chinese and Russian Evenki equal, it is clear that the classification of Evenki in China is a bit more complicated than in Russia. Ewenki is considered by most to be the same language as Evenki. The difference in the name is generally explained by the fact that the letter *v* sounds as a *w* in Chinese. When the different subgroups of Evenki in China are seen as the same language, the fact remains that different

subgroups are distinguished within the Chinese Evenki language group. They were officially seen as different groups, until 1958. Linguistic research led to the recognition of the subgroups as one language. It is clear that something different happened with the Evenki language at the other side of the border. The



Map 1: China

⁵¹ Janhunen, *Manchuria: An ethnic history*, 70.

⁵² Ibidem, 71.

⁵³ Ibidem, 70.

⁵⁴ Janhunen, *Manchuria: An ethnic history*, 72.

⁵⁵ The difference between Evenki and Ewenki is generally explained by the problems with translating the word, since the sound of the English letter 'V' does not exist in Chinese.

Chinese Evenks are originally from Russian soil and have been migrated during the centuries. When considering they should originally have spoken the same language, something must have happened with the group and the language development within the Chinese borders. The phased migrations towards China can be an explanation for the different subgroups in China, since the subgroups are linked to the language of the subgroup and distinguished to the phase in which they migrated towards China. The phased migrations towards China can be an explanation for the different subgroups in China, since the subgroups are linked to the language of the subgroup and distinguished to the phase in which they migrated towards China. The group Manchurian Reindeer-Evenki migrated around 1825, while the Solon Ewenke and the Khamnigan came in other periods, also in different groups. The groups probably developed language differences because they lived separated from each other and arrived in different phases. Possibly the small Evenk groups who migrated to China had contact speakers of other languages, which can also have had influence on Evenki. Contact with other languages can have effect on a language, specifically a minority language. Unfortunately, there is no data available to support these possible explanations. After spending several centuries or decades separated from the Siberian Evenks because of the Sino-Russian borders, the language has probably developed further, maybe under influence of other languages. The fact that the by the Soviets established literary language in Russia is not used in China, indicates that there is no unity between the groups. This raises the question remains however to what extent the Evenks in China and Russia are aware of each other. Despite the fact that there seems to be no unity between the Evenks on both sides of the Russian-Chinese border, the language is considered the same, which makes at least a linguistic unity. This might be only a unity according to scholars while this claim is not supported by the Evenks themselves.

In China the Evenks are spread through a large territory. Despite the large area their language is properly homogeneous through the whole territory, although the classification in subgroups would presume differently. This makes it possible for Evenks from several regions to communicate without difficulties worth mentioning.⁵⁶ A lot of discussion is still going on between scholars where the status of the Oroqen language is concerned. While some scholars are convinced that Oroqen should be included in the Evenk group, others think they should be seen as a separate group. China however acknowledged Oroqen as a separate ethnic group with a different language.⁵⁷ The discussion between scholars goes however further than just the distinction between Oroqen and Evenki and the question whether they are the same language

⁵⁶ Janhunen, *Manchuria: An ethnic history*, 67.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, 68-69.

and if they should be accounted to be part of the same ethnic group. Some scholars do not even consider Evenki on both sides of the Sino-Russian border the same language. The question is whether the classification of the different groups, Evenks and Oroqen, on the Chinese side of the border is a matter elaborate classification or that they are in fact another people.

In contrast to the Chinese classification, the Russian linguistics consider Oroqen as a dialect of Evenki.⁵⁸ Japanese researchers state that Solon corresponds with both Evenki and Oroqen.⁵⁹ Not only have China and Russia classified Evenks and Oroqen different, scholars are also still debating about the classification and whether Oroqen and Evenki should be treated as linguistic varieties.⁶⁰ The classification and the treatment of Evenki in China was also influenced by the language policy from 1949. The following chapter will first discuss the Soviet and Chinese language policy.

⁵⁸ Whaley, 'Revisiting Tungusic classification', 292.

⁵⁹ Zhang, 'Vowel systems of the Manchu-Tungus', 15.

⁶⁰ Whaley, 'Revisiting Tungusic classification', 286.

2. The theory of language policy and language vitality

Language policy has been studied for at least fifty years, with a growing interest in the last few decades. There is until now no consensus about the theory and the exact terminology used in the study of language policy.⁶¹ Language policy is in short the place where language and policy meet each other. Although the definition and its field of research is quite new, political leaders have struggled with language through all times. Almost every country has to deal with a form of language policy. In multilingual states the issue of language status is unavoidable for governments.⁶² A country may have to deal with several minority languages; the languages from migrants, small ethnic groups within the country or native peoples. The question of a national language, an educational instruction language and a common written language are all concerns of language policy, especially in multilingual states. Language policy shapes the language structure in a country and has impact on both national and minority languages. In the case of minority languages language policy can play a part in preservation or revitalization a language, but it can also contribute to language loss.⁶³ In order to determine whether and how language policy can affect languages, it is important to first define the concept.

What is language policy?

Several researchers have given different definitions of language policy, since there is no officially recognised definition. A discussion about the exact definition is still going on between scholars. Linguist Geneva Smitherman has given the following definition on language policy:

‘A language policy is a law, rules or precepts designed to bring about language change. Such a policy is encoded in mechanisms of language planning undertaken by governments, schools and other institutional bodies’.⁶⁴

According to Smitherman language policy runs primarily about changing the language. Although language change can be part of language policy it is not likely that it is the core purpose of language policy, since the politics of language concerns many other important purposes like managing the language use of minorities or the binding of a group by the

⁶¹ B. Spolsky, *Language policy* (2004) ix.

⁶² M.J. Esman, ‘The state and language policy’, *International Political Science Review* Vol. 13 No. 4 (1992) 381-396, 382.

⁶³ L.A. Grenoble, L.J. Whaley, *Saving languages: An introduction to language revitalization* (Cambridge 2005) 26.

⁶⁴ L.Fodde, *Race ethnicity and dialects: language policy and ethnic minorities in the United States* (Milan 2002) 13.

establishment of a national language. However, the definition of Smitherman is a valuable addition to the definition of language policy since she makes clear who would carry out the language policy as it happens; the governments, schools and other institutional bodies. Other researchers and linguists use different definitions. James Crawford, an American expert on language policy has composed the following definition about language policy:

‘What government does officially – through legislation, court decisions, executive actions, or other means - 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’.⁶⁵

Crawford’s definition of language policy is usable for this research on language policy. His definition focuses on different goals of language policy, with attention for the use of languages, national goals where language is concerned and has attention for the use of other languages. He also mentions the rights of individuals or groups, where learning, usage and maintenance of their languages are concerned. Language policy can determine which language is the national language, which languages are the minority languages and how the minority languages are to be used in society.

Nowadays around 125 countries have a form of language policy in their constitution. Written forms of language policy are not only found in national constitutions but also in cabinet documents or administrative regulations.⁶⁶ Richard Lambert distinguishes three basic types of nation states: monolingual, bi- or trilingual and multilingual.⁶⁷ In a monolingual state is one language associated with the national identity and is chosen as the national language. The second type of nation state is bi- or trilingual. In this type of countries two or three languages are associated with the national identity. The third type of nation state is multilingual and has a multi-ethnic society. Multilingual states have more than three national languages.⁶⁸ Language policy is an extra tool to strengthen the nation or a national identity by securing a national language and determine its role and function in society. At the same time language policy also determines the place of minority languages in society.

⁶⁵ Fodde, *Race ethnicity and dialects*, 14.

⁶⁶ Spolsky, *Language policy*, 11.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, 59-60.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, 60.

Language vitality and viability

Language policy can also have an effect on the vitality of a language, or to what extent the language is used as a means of communication in specific contexts or for specific purposes.⁶⁹ The viability of a language, to what extent a language is able to maintain or recover, can also be influenced by language policy, since it can shape an environment in which languages can maintain and or revitalize. It also defines the domains in which specific languages are spoken.

Language policy works in general positive for the national language(s) of a nation state. One or more national languages are chosen as the dominant language and are normally the language of instruction at schools. While the national language is brought up as the state language, minority languages are often marginalized. According to UNESCO there are six different forms of treatment of the minority languages in comparison to the national language: equal support, differentiated support, passive assimilation, active assimilation, forced assimilation and prohibition.⁷⁰ When there is equal support, all languages are supported equally, which in practice rarely occurs. More common is differentiated support where the minority languages are protected but not used in all domains of society. Passive assimilation occurs when there is no policy to assimilate minority groups, but it occurs nonetheless. In the absence of support for their minority language, the dominant language is mostly used, since it is the language of wider communication. Active assimilation, forced assimilation and prohibition are three different levels of language policy where governmental interventions force the minority groups to give up their minority language in favour of the national language.⁷¹ Language policy can have effect on the language vitality of a minority language, just like a negative attitude of the authorities. Despite the

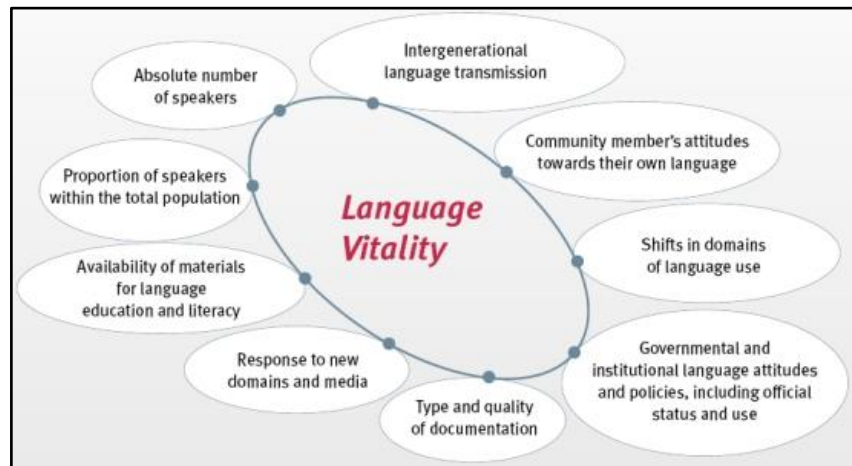


Figure 1: Language Vitality (UNESCO)

⁶⁹ SIL Language vitality SIL International Publications (2016). From: <http://www.sil.org/language-assessment/language-vitality> (15-6-2016).

⁷⁰ UNESCO, 'Language vitality and endangerment', *UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages* (Paris 2003) 1-25, 14.

⁷¹ Grenoble, *Saving languages*, 12.

fact that languages policy can be of great influence on the vitality of a language, in the end the speakers of the language are the ones who carry on the language, or abandon it.⁷²

This thesis seeks to determine and compare the viability of Evenki in Russia and China. In order to analyse the viability of Evenki, several language vitality factors need to be taken into account. Figure 1⁷³ shows the factors of language vitality used by UNESCO. The factor ‘intergenerational language transmission’ is about the transmission to other generations. ‘Absolute numbers of speakers’ and ‘the proportion of speakers within the total’ are measurable to a certain extent. However, it remains difficult to determine when one is a speaker of the language. Some people who consider themselves speakers of the language, are in fact only familiar with the language and know only a small amount of words. The factor ‘shifts in domains of language use’ is about to what extent the language is spoken in different domains, for example the official domain (government, educational institutions), the home domain, or more limited domains (ceremonial occasions, festivals and community level). To what extent the language has a meaningful function in the society is hereby important.⁷⁴ The factor ‘response to new domains and media’, like radio, television and social media shows another aspect of language vitality. A language that is able to respond to new domains shows more vitality than a language that does not. The sixth UNESCO factor of language vitality concerns the ‘availability of materials for language education and literacy’. The existence of these materials can be an expression of pride for the language and play an important part in language maintenance and revival. Literacy is also connected to social and economic development. However, education in the language is essential for the language vitality.⁷⁵ ‘Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies, including official status and use’ is another vital part of the determination of language vitality. The attitude from the outside and inside (‘community member’s attitudes towards their own language’) are important for the maintenance of languages. Language policies determine to what extent the language is to be used in official domains or can make efforts to maintain a language or revitalize it. A negative attitude or limited support towards the language from the outside can lead to the development of negative attitudes inside the language communities. The last factor of language viability is the ‘type and quality of documentation’. This concerns documentation in the form of grammars, dictionaries and the (constant) production of education materials.

⁷² UNESCO, ‘Language vitality and endangerment’, 4.

⁷³ http://www.mtholyoke.edu/~alvar22n/Disappearing_Languages/Language_Classification.html (8-7-2016).

⁷⁴ UNESCO, ‘Language vitality and endangerment’, 10-11.

⁷⁵ UNESCO, ‘Language vitality and endangerment’, 12.

The factors that are discussed have the ability to strengthen each other and mutually affect each other. When a language appears low on the scale of a specific factor, this is not necessarily the case for other factors. A small number of speakers within a large group may suggest a low language viability, but when the attitude towards the language in the group who do speak the language is very positive, the language is spoken in many domains, education in the language is given, the language is more viable than the number of speakers would indicate. The next chapter will discuss the language policy of the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, while the fourth chapter seeks to determine the viability of Evenki in Russia and China in the several domains.

3. Language policy in the USSR and the PRC

From 1917 onwards the Soviet Union imposed a language policy on the Soviet people. In 1949 China followed the example of the Soviet Union when they established a communist state and imposed a similar language policy. The Evenks on both sides of the Russian-Chinese border had to deal with this language policy. The Soviet language policy appeared in three stages. The first period, between 1917 and the late 1950s, showed a more or less supporting attitude towards Evenki and other minority languages, although the dominance of Russian grew during this period. The following period from 1958 until the 1980s was characterized by aggressive russification. The third phase of the Soviet language policy from the 1980s until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 showed a revival of minority languages and cultures, initiated by indigenous peoples including Evenks.⁷⁶ The language policy of the People's Republic of China can be divided in five different phases. The first period from 1949 showed a policy with egalitarian respect for minority languages. The second phase of the Chinese language policy from 1957 until the early 1965 is marked as an unstable policy towards minority languages, with a gap between constitution and reality. The third phase (1966-1976) was the period of the Cultural Revolution and showed suppression of minority languages.⁷⁷ In this period all Non-Han languages, including Evenki, were seen as backward and the government actively tried to destroy those languages.⁷⁸ Restoration of the status of minority languages marked the fourth phase between 1977 and 1990. From 1991 onwards, Evenki and other minorities languages regained the rights from the period before the Cultural Revolution and bilingualism became a political goal.⁷⁹

This chapter will look at the language policy measures taken in the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. This policy was imposed by governments and therefore the laws and measures concerning Evenki will be discussed and compared. The starting point of both language policies was comparable, since China chose the Soviet model of minority language policy as an example for their own minority policy.

Language policy of the Soviet Union

In November 1917, short after the October Revolution which led to the installation of a Soviet government, Lenin signed the Declaration of the Peoples of Russia:

⁷⁶ Grenoble, 'Language policy and the loss of Tungusic languages', 378.

⁷⁷ A.S.L. Lam, *Language education in China. Policy and experience from 1949* (Hong Kong 2005) 124.

⁷⁸ Grenoble, 'Language policy and the loss of Tungusic languages', 381.

⁷⁹ Lam, *Language education in China*, 124.

‘The united will of this Congresses, The Councils of the People's Commissars, resolved to base of their activity upon the question of the nationalities of Russia, as expressed in the following principles:

1. The equality and sovereignty of the peoples of Russia.
2. The right of the peoples of Russia to free self-determination, even to the point of separation and the formation of an independent state.
3. The abolition of any and all national and national-religious privileges and disabilities.
4. The free development of national minorities and ethnographic groups inhabiting the territory of Russia’.⁸⁰

Lenin further proclaimed that everyone should be given the right to be educated and give education in their own language. He also rejected the idea of a national language, obligatory for all inhabitants of the Soviet Union.⁸¹ Lenin was convinced that the Russian language had to be adopted voluntary, which would eventually lead to the acceptance of the Russian language as a common language. He further believed that a national language was not necessary for the functioning of a modern state and that imposing a national language would have a negative effect.⁸² Lenin was even convinced that no language should be given the status of ‘state language’, especially not the Russian language.⁸³ In 1925, Stalin declared he had little faith in one single language for all Soviet people. According to him, all cases that were used as an example proved this did not work out in practice.⁸⁴ The use of ethnic and regional languages and education in these languages was promoted, but where education was concerned, a problem occurred. A lot of people were illiterate, especially the Siberian people. It was problematic to teach them to read and write in their own language, since the Siberian languages, including the Evenki language were not even written languages. In order to educate Evenks and in their own language, the language first had to become a written one. The same problem occurred for other Siberian languages. Although there was no geographical area where all Evenks lived since they

⁸⁰ Vladimir Ulyanov *Декларация прав народов России* (2(15)-11-1917). From: <http://www.hist.msu.ru/ER/Etext/DEKRET/peoples.htm> (27-5-2016).

⁸¹ J. Smith, ‘The Education of National Minorities: The Early Soviet Experience’, *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol.75, No.2 (1997) 281-307, 285.

⁸² Smith, ‘The Education of National Minorities’, 284.

⁸³ Kirkwood, ‘Glasnost, the national question and Soviet language policy’ *Soviet Studies*, Vol.43, No.1 (1991) 61-81, 61.

⁸⁴ J. Ornstein, ‘Soviet language policy: Theory and practice’, *The Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (1959) 1-24, 3.

lived a nomadic life, and therefore it was impossible to give them an autonomous area, they did have a shared language. The Soviet Union gave itself the task to create a written form, for the Evenki language and other minority languages, since all languages were considered equal according to the Soviet Union. It was however an overwhelming task to create written languages for all indigenous languages, since the group of indigenous languages counted more than hundred. Therefore, the Soviets focused on groups with linguistic similarities and out of them a few representative languages were chosen. Evenki appeared to be one of these languages, together with Even, Yakut, Dolgan and many other Siberian languages.⁸⁵

Before the written form of Evenki could be established, several choices had to be made. The first choice that had to be made, was the kind of alphabet that was to be used. Finally, the Latin alphabet was chosen.⁸⁶ Figure 2 shows the Evenki alphabet in Latin.⁸⁷ The Cyrillic script was rejected, probably

Evenki alphabet (Latin)									
A a	B b	C c	D d	E e	Ē ē	F f	G g	Ĝ ĝ	H h
a	bē	cē	dē	e	ē	ēf	gē	ĝē	ha
[a]	[b]	[ts]	[d]	[ə]	[e]	[f]	[g]	[ɣ]	[x]
I i	J j	K k	L l	M m	N n	ng	Ō ō	O o	P p
i	jē	ka	ēl	ēm	ēn		ō	o	pē
[i]	[ɕ]	[k]	[l]	[m]	[n]	[ŋ]	[ɔ]	[u]	[p]
Q q	R r	S s	T t	U u	V v	W w	X x	Y y	Z z
qē	ēr	ēs	tē	u	vē	wē	xa	yē	zē
[tʃ]	[r]	[s]	[t]	[u]	[v]	[w]	[ʃ]	[j]	[dz]

Figure 2: Evenki alphabet (Latin)

because of the negative connotations with the tsarist empire and its aggressive Russification.⁸⁸ The Southern dialect was chosen, like already explained. At first the Nep dialect. The choice for this dialect is to be found in the fact that this dialect had the greatest resemblance with the majority of the other Evenki dialects on lexical, morphological and phonological features. Besides that, another important factor for the choice of the southern Nep dialect was the belief that this speech was found in the geographic centre of the Evenk people.⁸⁹ The literary dialect was later changed to the southern Podkameno-Tungus dialect, or Poligusov in the year 1952, as a result of the forced collectivization and resettlement.⁹⁰ The problem that occurred was that the literary language was initially based on a majority of Evenks speaking this particular dialect in the Evenki Autonomous region. Now that the Nep speakers were widely dispersed, there was no longer a centre of Nep speaking

⁸⁵ Grenoble, 'Language policy and the loss of Tungusic languages', 375.

⁸⁶ Ethnologue *Evenki* SIL International Publications (2016). From: <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/evn> (10-10-2016).

⁸⁷ S. Ager *Evenki (Эвэнки/Ēwēnki)* Omniglot (2016) From: <http://omniglot.com/writing/evenki.htm> (17-5-2016).

⁸⁸ Kirkwood, 'Glasnost, the national question and Soviet language policy', 62.

⁸⁹ Grenoble, 'Language policy and the loss of Tungusic languages', 376.

⁹⁰ N. Bulatova, L. Grenoble, *Evenki* (1999) 3.

people in that specific region. Holding on to the ideal that had initially led to the choice for the Nep dialect, now the shift was made towards the Podkameno-Tungus dialect. However, a negative side effect was that this decision eventually removed all the progress that literary Evenki had made as a standard literary language. The standard literary Evenki was never popular, because of the earlier mentioned dialect problem.

The constitution of 1936 established the rights of minority languages and the minorities rights to education in Article 45.

‘Citizens of the USSR have the right to education. This right is ensured by free provision of all forms of education, by the institution of universal, compulsory secondary education, and broad development of vocational, specialised secondary, and higher education...[...]...by the free issue of school textbooks; by the opportunity to attend a school where teaching is in the native language; and by the provision of facilities for self-education’.⁹¹

Although education in the native language was permitted, this turned out to be a problem in practise. Many teachers only spoke Russian and pedagogical materials were not available in the native languages.⁹² Article 36 of the revised 1936 Constitution stated that:

‘Citizens of the USSR of different races and nationalities have equal rights. Exercise of these rights is ensured by a policy of all-round development and drawing together of all the nations and nationalities of the USSR, by educating citizens in the spirit of Soviet patriotism and socialist internationalism, and by the possibility to use their native language and the languages of other peoples in the USSR. Any direct or indirect limitation of the rights of citizens or establishment of direct or indirect privileges on grounds of race or nationality, and any advocacy of racial or national exclusiveness, hostility, or contempt, are punishable by law’.⁹³

⁹¹ USSR *Constitutional Law of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics* (1977). From: <http://www.constitution.org/cons/ussr77.txt> (18-6-2016).

⁹² Grenoble, ‘Language policy and the loss of Tungusic languages’, 376.

⁹³ USSR *Constitutional Law of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics* (1977). From: <http://www.constitution.org/cons/ussr77.txt> (18-6-2016).

With this law the rights of Evenks were equal with other minorities and Russians. The use of the native language was confirmed in this law of equality. In Article 159 the right to use the native language in court was established.

‘Judicial proceedings shall be conducted in the language of the Union Republic, Autonomous Republic, Autonomous Region, or Autonomous Area, or in the language spoken by the majority of the people in the locality. Persons participating in court proceedings, who do not know the language in which they are being conducted, shall be ensured the right to become fully acquainted with the materials in the case; the services of an interpreter during the proceedings; and the right to address the court in their own language’.⁹⁴

A decree of 13 March 1938 called ‘On the obligatory Study of Russian Language in schools in the National Republic and Provinces’, from the Council of People’s Commissars made the study and use of Russian language mandatory.⁹⁵ In 1937-1938 the Soviets transferred the alphabets of several established languages like Evenki, from Latin script to Cyrillic script, like already explained earlier in this chapter. The alphabet of Evenki was changed to Cyrillic script in 1937.⁹⁶ Figure 3 shows the Evenki alphabet in Cyrillic. ⁹⁷ Although the official explanation for the change of alphabets was that this would make it easier for those speaking other languages than Russian to make own the Russian language, in fact the reasons for doing so were neither linguistic nor pedagogical.

Evenki alphabet (Cyrillic)								
А а	Б б	В в	Г г	Д д	Е е	Ё ё	Ж ж	З з
а	бе	ве	ге	де	е	ё	же	зе
[a]	[w-û; v]	[v]	[g; ʏ]	[d]	[je]	[jo]	[ʒ]	[z]
И и	Й й	К к	Л л	М м	Н н	Ң ң	О о	П п
и	й	ка	ел	ем	ен	ең	о	пе
[i]	[j]	[k]	[l]	[m]	[n]	[ŋ/ng]	[o]	[p]
Р р	С с	Т т	У у	Ф ф	Х х	Ц ц	Ч ч	Ш ш
ер	ес	те	у	еф	ха	цц	че	ша
[r]	[s]	[t]	[u; u]	[f]	[x; h]	[ʦ]	[ʧ]	[ʃ]
Ш ш	Ъ ъ	Ы ы	Ь ь	Э э	Ю ю	Я я		
ша		ы		э	ю	я		
šç	"	у	'	é	ju	ja		
[ʃ]		[i-ø]	[ʲ]	[e]	[ju]	[ja]		

Figure 3: Evenki in Cyrillic script 1

⁹⁴USSR *Constitutional Law of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics* (1977). From: <http://www.constitution.org/cons/ussr77.txt> (18-6-2016).

⁹⁵ Anderson, B.A. and Silver, B.D., ‘Equality efficiency, and politics in Soviet bilingual education policy 1934-1980’, *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 78, No.4 (1984) 1019-1039, 1021.

⁹⁶ Ethnologue *Evenki* SIL International Publications (2016). From: <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/evn> (10-10-2016).

⁹⁷ From: <https://nl.pinterest.com/source/omniglot.com/> (17-3-2016).

The arrest of the scholars who had previously helped to establish the languages in Latin script showed that the decision was a political one.⁹⁸

The late 1950s turned out to be a period of more Russification and less space for individual languages. In 1956, at the Twentieth Party Congress of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev (1894-1971) demanded the establishment of a wide network of boarding schools through the Soviet Union. Eventually the system of boarding schools turned out to be a part of the coming educational reforms.⁹⁹ The Educational Reforms initiated by Khrushchev in 1958 were one of several factors which led to the revocation of the before guaranteed education in one's mother tongue. A discussion about the ranking of languages started, which was the opposite of the Lenin's idea that all languages were equal. The Russian language became the first language in the Soviet Union, for both Russians and non-Russians.¹⁰⁰ The idea was to establish a so-called National-Russian bilingualism.¹⁰¹ Although it was still accepted to speak Evenki, the Russian became more dominant.

The language of instruction at the boarding schools was Russian. The education of Evenk children at Soviet boarding schools had a negative effect on the preservation of the Evenki language, since it was forbidden to speak the language. The same can be said about the rest of Khrushchev's educational reforms. In the period between 1958 and 1972 the status of Evenki in the educational system was degraded. In 1958, at the start of Khrushchev's reforms, Evenki was the instruction languages in the first and second grade. In 1972 Evenki was no longer an instruction language at all. The language of instruction had become Russian, for both lower and higher grades.

Since the establishment of boarding schools, many Evenk children went to these schools. Between 1956 and 1960 the number of boarding schools increased as a response to Khrushchev's educational reforms.¹⁰² Evenk children lived at these schools for nine months a year and were not allowed to speak Evenki. However, this was only in practice, since it was never prohibited by law to speak minority languages at boarding schools. The classes were in Russian and the only language to communicate in was Russian, since children from different backgrounds, both Russians and non-Russians, lived together at these boarding schools. The schools educated children from many different ages, from kindergarten to secondary level.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Grenoble, 'Language policy and the loss of Tungusic languages', 376.

⁹⁹ E. Ambler, 'The Soviet boarding school', *The American Slavic and East European Review*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (1961) 237-252, 237.

¹⁰⁰ Grenoble, 'Language policy and the loss of Tungusic languages', 378.

¹⁰¹ L.A. Grenoble, L.J. Whaley, *Endangered languages. Language loss and Community response* (1998) 47.

¹⁰² Michael Kaser, 'Soviet Boarding Schools', *Soviet Studies*, Vol.20, No.1 (1968) 94-105, 94.

¹⁰³ Grenoble, 'Language policy and the loss of Tungusic languages', 377.

Since the education in Russian started early, it was difficult for Evenk children to preserve their language. Russian was after all the language that they spoke nine months a year, the language of education and the common literary language. Soviet boarding schools were discriminating against native languages. The lack of prestige of Evenki, which was propagated by the institutions did not motivate Evenk children to learn and preserve Evenki.

Language policy in the People's Republic of China

Soon after the instalment of the Communist administration, the Soviet model for minority languages was adopted by the People's Republic of China.¹⁰⁴ The Soviet Union promoted the possibility of education in the native language and the creation of writing systems. The first national conference of the Ministry of Education, held in September 1951 led to the following resolution on minority languages in China:

'Regarding use in minority education, the conference has decided that in minority communities with regularly used writing systems, such as Mongol, Korean, Tibetan, Uygur, Kazak, etc, native languages must be used as medium of instruction in every course in primary and secondary schools. In minority communities with their own languages but without writing systems or without functional writing systems, measures shall be taken to create writing systems and to reform writing systems, and meanwhile, depending on the community's choice, Chinese or a language customary use in the community shall be adopted as the language of instruction'.¹⁰⁵

In November of the same year, this resolution became an official policy for minority education in the PCR. Although the Soviet Union had already created a writing system for Evenki in Latin script, which was later replaced by Cyrillic script, the Chinese administration did not adopt the Soviet writing system. There is no evidence that the Evenks in China themselves were familiar with the written form of Evenki by the Soviet Union. Evenki in China was considered a language without writing system, although it was according to the resolution for minority education qualified to be provided with a written language. Ethnologist G.P. Serdyuchencko recommended to adopt the Cyrillic writing system that was used in the Soviet Evenk communities. This was both a linguistic advice as a political advice by a Soviet advisor of the

¹⁰⁴ M. Zhou, *Multilingualism in China. The Politics of Writing Reforms for Minority Languages, 1949-2002* (2003) 209.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, 48.

Institute of Linguistics.¹⁰⁶ At the same time, between 1950 and 1956, only preliminary research was done, commissioned by the communist government, in order to help classify the different minorities within the borders of the PRC and the future creation of written languages.¹⁰⁷ The classification of the minorities of China was connected to Article 3 of the First National People's Congress in 1954:

‘The people’s Republic of China is a unitary multinational state; all the nationalities are equal. Discrimination against or oppression of any nationality, and acts which undermine the unity of the nationalities are prohibited. All the nationalities have the freedom to use and develop their own spoken and written languages, and to preserve or reform their own customs and ways. Regional autonomy applies in areas where a minority nationality lives in a compact community. All the national autonomous areas are inseparable parts of the People’s Republic of China.’¹⁰⁸

In order to assign regional and national autonomous areas to minorities, they first had to be officially recognised. The recognition of the several minority groups had the highest priority of the two. Linguistic research was in the first place used as a tool to recognise the Chinese minorities. After 1956 the emphasis of the Chinese minority policy shifted towards language. From this time onward, seven teams with each more than 700 members organised linguistic research in fifteen provinces and regions of 42 minorities. Small minorities were not forgotten by the researchers. The research delivered information about minority languages, scripts and classification. Scripts were created and sometimes improved by the scholars, where they thought it was necessary.¹⁰⁹ In the period between 1950 and 1987 China recognised 55 minorities, within its borders.¹¹⁰ The majority of the official recognitions of the Chinese minorities were completed by 1958, although the process gradually went on until the mid-1970s, when new applications were processed. Some minorities that were not recognised in the 1950s were in later decennia.¹¹¹ The Evenks were recognised with the first group before 1958. The four subgroups were from then onwards recognised as one group. The establishment of the

¹⁰⁶ Zhou, *Multilingualism in China*, 178-179.

¹⁰⁷ Xingwu, Alatan, ‘China’s policy towards her minority nationalities’, *Social Scientist*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (1988) 136-159, 149.

¹⁰⁸ C. Mackerras, *China’s ethnic minorities and globalisation* (2003) 145.

¹⁰⁹ Xingwu, ‘China’s policy towards her minority nationalities’, 149.

¹¹⁰ X. Chunli, ‘Autonomy and China’s ethnic minorities: An observation of autonomous legislations’, *Asia-Pacific Journal on Human Rights and the Law*, Vol. 2 (2008) 11.

¹¹¹ D. Bradley, ‘Language policy and language endangerment in China’, *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, No. 173 (2005) 1–21, 2.

Evenk Autonomous Banner took place in the same year. However, the creation of a written Evenki language was not realised. In practice this led to education in Mandarin-Chinese (Putonghua) for the Evenk children. The development of written media, and educational materials was not possible in Evenki, since there was no written language available.

Around the late 1950s the attitude towards minority languages changed. The short period of the Hundred Flowers Campaign in 1957, which was characterized by the encouragement of freedom of criticism, had led to the expression of the wish for independence by some minority groups.¹¹² In 1958 the Great Leap Forward was introduced. This campaign, led by Mao, moved the minority policy of integration to the stage of assimilation. This led in some cases to violence and resistance. Rebellions broke out and were broke down with violence.¹¹³ In this period the importance of a national language, Putonghua, was argued by many. Promoting the language among youth and schoolchildren was considered important by the Chinese government. In 1958 at the start of the Great Leap Forward the following was reported at the fifth plenary of the first National People's Congress:

‘The policy promoting Putonghua will not harm the rights of minority nationalities to use and develop their own languages. It is definitely our intention to promote Putonghua mainly among the Han people. The teaching of Putonghua should also be introduced to minority nationalities. It is good for mature learning and national unity. It will be for the common benefit of all the nationalities in China’.¹¹⁴

This new attitude towards minority languages and the promotion of the national language Putonghua did not have a significant effect on Evenki in China. Since Evenki was no written language in the People's Republic of China and the Soviet version of the written language in Cyrillic was not adopted. Nor was the written language in Latin script. As a result, Evenk children already received education in Mandarin Chinese, so the change of language policy had a limited effect on the Evenks. However, the attitude of the Yunnan government in the late 1950s did have an effect on Evenki. They stated that ‘Writing systems already created should be neither cancelled nor used; writing systems not yet created should not be created at all’.¹¹⁵ Since written Evenki was not yet established in China, Evenki appeared to be one of the

¹¹² J. Dreyer, ‘China's Minority Nationalities in the Cultural Revolution’, *The China Quarterly*, No. 35 (1968) 96-109, 98.

¹¹³ Mackerras, *China's ethnic minorities*, 151.

¹¹⁴ L. Tsung, *Minority languages, education and communities in China* (Hong Kong 2009) 89.

¹¹⁵ Tsung, *Minority languages*, 89-90.

languages of which the government thought it better not to create a written form at all. This meant for the Evenks that their language would not be present in several domains.

The period of the Cultural Revolution sometimes even led to the discontinuation of languages by force. Some minorities reported that the singing of folksongs in minority languages were forbidden in some areas.¹¹⁶ The law of 1954 which stated that ‘all nationalities have the freedom to use and develop their native languages’ was changed in 1975. The word ‘develop’ was now deleted from this article in the law.¹¹⁷ This new direction in language policy, with sometimes even a prohibition to use the native language, although this is not stated in the law, had the potential to harm native languages. The period of the Cultural Revolution exposed a threat to both written and spoken minority languages.

From 1977 the restoration of minority languages rights began. Only a year later the rights of minority groups were restored. In 1982 Article 4 of the Constitution of China reactivated that: ‘every ethnic group has the freedom to use and develop its own language and script and to maintain or change its own cultural practises’.¹¹⁸ In 1984 the PRC Regional Autonomy Law for Minority Nationalities was enacted Article 47 decided the rights of minorities and the use of their languages in court.

‘In the prosecution and trial of cases...[...]...They shall guarantee that citizens of all nationalities have the right to use the spoken and written languages of their own nationalities in court proceedings. The people’s courts and people’s procuratorates should provide translation of the court proceedings to anyone who is not familiar with the spoken of written languages in commonly use in the locality.’¹¹⁹

With the legislation of the use of spoken minority languages, the possibility to use Evenki in the public domain became available, at least in theory. It remains unclear how many court proceedings have taken place in Evenki and whether this has taken place at all. The possibility to use Evenki in a part of the public domain at least strengthened the position of the language on paper. Article 37 of the same law addressed the matter of education in minority languages:

¹¹⁶ Lam, *Language education in China*, 127.

¹¹⁷ Zhou, *Multilingualism in China*, 77.

¹¹⁸ Lam, *Language education in China*, 128.

¹¹⁹ Xingwu, ‘China’s policy towards her minority nationalities’, 149.

'In schools which mainly recruit students of minority nationalities, textbooks in languages of minority nationalities concerned should also be used where conditions exist. Languages for instruction should also be the languages of the minority nationalities concerned. Primary school students of higher grades and secondary school students should learn [the] Chinese language. Putonghua [Mandarin Chinese], which is commonly used throughout the country, should be popularized among them'.¹²⁰

Although the new 1984 law concerning minority education, which are still in force nowadays, states that the language of minorities should also be the language of instruction and that where possible the textbooks in minorities languages should be used, it also recommends the learning of Putonghua. Children of minority groups in primary and secondary schools would at some point however had to learn the Chinese language. This was unavoidable for all children that went to school. For Evenk children there were no available textbooks in their native language, since Evenki was still no official written language in China. Their education in Mandarin Chinese went on, although some Evenks living in areas with a dominant minority language with an official script, might also receive education in this minority language. In China Evenki is experimentally written in Mongolian script.¹²¹

The following chapter will look at several domains, and will discuss in which of them Evenki is represented and to what extent. This will be done for both Russia and China, in a comparative context, in order to determine the viability of Evenki. Interesting in this comparison is the fact that Evenki in Russia is a written language, while Evenki in China is only a spoken language.

¹²⁰ Y. Wang, J. Phillion, 'Minority Language Policy and Practise in China. The Need for Multicultural Education', *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2009) 3.

¹²¹ G. Kara *Evenki Grammar* Indiana University Bloomington (2007) From: <http://www.indiana.edu/~ceus/courses/u520-evenki-grammar-kara.shtml> (1-7-2016).

4. Current language situation and vitality in Russia and China

The Soviet and Chinese language policy started in a similar way, but eventually followed a different path. Especially for Evenks the applied language policy led to a different outcome, of which the difference concerning the establishment or lack of a written language in respectively the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China is at first sight the most striking difference. Now that the language policies made explicit and the laws concerning minority languages have been made explicit, the viability of the language will be discussed. The factors, introduced in the second chapter, will be used to determine the vitality of Evenki in Russia and China.

Intergenerational Language Transmission

When looking at the vitality of a language, immediately the following question arises, is the language transferred to new generations? The active use of the language by younger generations is important for the persistence of the language. When a language is no longer passed on to children, they will not be able to transfer the language to their children. When no one has knowledge of the language anymore, the language will eventually die. In order to find out how vital Evenki is in Russia and China, one needs to look at the intergenerational language transmission.

In Russia the language has the status 7 or 'shifting', according to Ethnologue¹²², which means that the language is spoken by the elder generation and the child-bearing generation, but is no longer transferred to children. The grandparent and parent generations do speak Evenki with each other.¹²³ Unfortunately, there are no census data available to support this claim. Interviews with Evenks from several areas confirm this language status. Evenks in the so-called Ekonda brigade, a reindeer-brigade, showed that adults spoke Evenki with the oldest members. When the children arrived in the tent they were addressed in Evenki and Russian. They answered their grandfather in Russian.¹²⁴ This language situation is typical for shifting languages and appears to happen often in Evenki speaking communities.

Mira Sivtseva, a young Evenk woman born in 1990 in the Evenki village Kutana, did research about the Evenki language revitalization for her master thesis at the Arctic University of Norway. She interviewed several Evenks from different generations; the elder generations

¹²² Ethnologue is a comprehensive reference work cataloguing all of the world's known living languages since 1951.

¹²³ Ethnologue *Evenki* SIL International Publications (2016). From: <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/evn> (10-10-2016).

¹²⁴ N.A. Mamontova, 'What language do real Evenki speak? Discussions surrounding the Nomad Preschool', *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia*, Vol. 53, No. 4 (2014) 37-75, 50.

born in the 1930s-1940s, those from the generation of their children and grandchildren.¹²⁵ She also describes the language situation in her own Evenk family. Her great-grandmother Praskovia (born in 1932), from the elder generation appeared to be the last Evenki speaker of her family. She had not passed on the language to her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren:

‘When my great-grandma was rather old, at the age of seventy, I started asking her about Evenki words, names of animals, and natural phenomena. I have used several notebooks to write our conversations down. She was the last person in our family who could speak Evenki and remembered all stories about our family from the early 20th century. When she passed away I felt sorry that I could not write all of her stories down, that I did not have a recorder to perpetuate the story of my family, and of our nation’.¹²⁶

With the death of Mira’s great-grandmother, the line of Evenki-speaking members in her family ended. Nevertheless at least a few words were probably passed on in a passive form. This is very common under Evenks, where the younger generations often know a few words and are able to understand the language to a certain extent, but do answer in Russian or another language. Mira also tells that her great-grandmother used everyday life Evenki words.

‘We never spoke Evenki language at home, only my great-grandmother knew it. She used Evenki words in everyday life to describe berries, trees, animals. I had a dog, a Siberian husky, and when a man first brought it to us as a puppy, it was like a little bear - fluffy and toed. My grandma called him Amikan. Amikan is an Evenki word which means “a bear”, “a grandpa”’.¹²⁷

Although this is just a story of one Evenk family, the earlier mentioned Ekonda situation supports the story of Mira. Elder people speak the language, while the younger people speak Russian or other local languages. In 2014 Nadezhda Mamontova did a comprehensive study about language maintenance in the Evenki municipal district of Krasnoïarsk krai, also called Evenkiia. During her research she asked if a school evening party could be performed in the

¹²⁵ M. Sivtseva, ‘The role of the new Evenkness in the Evenki language revitalization: The case of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia)’, *Masterthesis The Arctic University of Norway* (2015), 1-95, 5.

¹²⁶ *Ibidem*, 20.

¹²⁷ *Ibidem*, 38.

Evenki language. The answer of the graduates of the boarding school was that only grandmothers would attend.¹²⁸ Evenki is thus considered by many as a language for elder people, although an interview with a teacher at an ethnic-based school in Yakutsk where Evenki language is taught as a subject, wants to pass Evenki on to children by education.

‘Not a long time ago the Evenki language was “the language of elders”; no one was interested in it. Moreover, people were kind of not willing to speak it. When I met an Evenki who fluently spoke our mother tongue I was amazed. They freely communicated in the Evenki. I felt ashamed of being not that proficient, it made me to commit even more to study. I want to complete my study and teach the Evenki language to other people’.¹²⁹

Despite the efforts of this teacher, the language is in general not passed on to the generation of children. Where he teaches Evenki is a subject, not the language of instruction. Unfortunately, this is the case in all communities where Evenki is spoken. Altogether, the language status accredited by ethnologue and the answers given by the interviewed Evenks shows the same image. Evenki in Russia is a language 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. This status concerning the intergenerational transmission is called severely endangered by UNESCO.¹³⁰

Ethnologue gives the same language status for Evenki in China, also 7 or ‘shifting’. Unfortunately, in the case of China there are also no census data available to support this claim. Only very few children are reported to speak Evenki. Only the subgroup Khamnigan is said to have a significant number of children who are Evenki speakers.¹³¹ Unfortunately few sources are found to support this claim. In an interview Yu Lan, a woman who married a Chinese Evenk, regretted the fact that her daughter only speaks the language brokenly and said the following about the Evenki language and its speakers:

¹²⁸ Mamontova, ‘What language do real Evenki speak?’, 60.

¹²⁹ Sivtseva, ‘The role of the new Evenkiness’, 82.

¹³⁰ UNESCO, ‘Language vitality and endangerment’, 8.

¹³¹ Ethnologue *Evenki* SIL International Publications (2016). From: <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/evn> (10-10-2016).

‘Children no longer have the environment to speak Ewenki. Few people under the age of 30 are able to speak it fluently. Protection of the language is more difficult than the survival of ethnic music or arts’.

Although Yu makes clear that only few children speak the language, she points out a difference with the Russian Evenks. She tells that people under the age of 30 hardly speak the language fluently. In Russia in most families the great-grandparent or the grandparent generation is the eldest speaker of Evenki. Yu speaks about a significant lower age as a parting line between speakers of the language and fluent speakers of the language. Another significant difference is the fact that Yu speaks about younger generations not being fluent in the language, while in Russia most children do not speak the language at all. Du Mei, another Evenk from Inner Mongolia is a limited speaker of Evenki herself.

‘I can only understand it a little and say a few everyday expressions. My children don't understand it at all. They only learn Chinese. There are about 30,000 Ewenki and our language is on the verge of extinction. I often talk about the need here to speed up efforts to protect it’.¹³²

Du Mei’s opinion is less optimistic than that of Yu Lan. Where Yu speaks of difficulties with the protection of the language, Du Mei is convinced that Evenki in China is about to extinct very rapidly. Differences might be explained by living in different regions, where the vitality of the language differs. It is also possible that members of some families have almost lost the language, while it has still a strong position in other families. Li Lam, a professor of dialectology at the Institute of Linguistics under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and also a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference is convinced that the future prospects are also a reason for not passing on the language to younger generations.

‘Many parents who speak minority languages or local dialects are unwilling to pass them on to their children because they fear it will affect their Mandarin skills and therefore their chances of finding a good job when they leave school’.¹³³

¹³² *China's minority languages face threat of extinction* China Daily (3-12-2010). From: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/life/2010-03/12/content_9581687.htm (12-7-2015).

¹³³ *Yu Ran Dialects endangered by modernization* China Daily (17-3-2011). From: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011-03/17/content_12183431.htm (12-7-2015).

This argument is also used on the Russian side of the mutual border, where parents are afraid that the Russian language skills are undermined by Evenki. Many parents do not pass on the language do this consciously. They are convinced that mastering the Russian and Chinese language will give their children better chances in life, while they fear that the mastery of Evenki will go at the expense of the Russian and Chinese, which will lead to less chances for admittance to higher education.

A comparative research by Janhunen to the Tungusic speech communities on the Russian and Chinese side, showed that a greater number of younger speakers was found on the Chinese side of the border. This would indicate that although Evenki is mostly spoken by the elder generations, a significant greater number younger generations speak Evenki on the Chinese side. The intergenerational language transmission might be less disturbed in China than in Russia, at least according to Janhunens research.¹³⁴

Absolute Number of Speakers and the proportion of Speakers within the Total

Evenki is considered a shifting language in both Russia and China and the number of speakers is declining on both sides of the Russian-Chinese border. Less Evenks speak Evenki, a result of several circumstances. The earlier discussed tendency fact that parents no longer pass on of the language to younger generations has at least contributed to this decline.

According to the 2010 census, Russia has 38,400 Evenks living within its borders. Only 4,800 Evenks are speakers of the Evenki language and most of them are multilingual, in most cases bilingual of trilingual.¹³⁵ Those who are multilingual mostly speak Russian, Yakut and Buriat besides Evenki. According to the International Child Development Centre, in the 1999/2000 academic year 25% of Evenki children have been taught their native language. Currently, the Evenki language is taught in 12 schools among 30 ethnic schools, whereas there are 79 “indigenous villages” in Yakutia.¹³⁶ Although the number of Evenks has grown from 29,975 according to the 1989 census to 38,400 in 2010, the number of Evenki speakers has declined from 9,000 in 1989 to 4,800 in the year 2010.¹³⁷ An contrary movement is taken place at the moment. While the number of Evenks is growing, the number of Evenki speakers is declining. At the moment approximately 12,5% of the Evenks is an Evenki speaker.

¹³⁴ Janhunen, ‘Tungusic an endangered language’, 47.

¹³⁵ Ethnologue *Evenki* SIL International Publications (2016). From: <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/evn> (10-10-2016).

¹³⁶ Sivtseva, ‘The role of the new Evenkiness’, 73.

¹³⁷ Grenoble, ‘Language policy and the loss of Tungusic languages’, 374.

The ethnic population of Evenks within the Chinese borders counts 30,875 people, according to the last census in the year 2010.¹³⁸ This makes the number of Evenks comparable to that of Russia. Approximately 11,000 of them are active speakers of the language.¹³⁹ The Evenki speakers are not all ethnic Evenks, in regions where Evenki is a language of significance, although not the dominant language, other ethnic people have adopted the language. Those Evenks who are bilingual speak both Evenki and Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua).¹⁴⁰ At the moment approximately 36% of the Chinese Evenks is considered an Evenki speaker.

The number and percentage of Evenki speakers in China is larger than in Russia, despite the fact that Russia counts more ethnic Evenks than China. China has more Evenki speakers in absolute numbers and as a proportion of speakers in the total population. This is a very interesting finding in view of the fact that Evenki in China is only a spoken language, while Evenki in Russia has a written script and even provides education in Evenki. In both countries the number of speakers is a minority within the total population, which gives the Evenki in both countries the status 'severely endangered' according to UNESCO criteria.¹⁴¹

Shifts in Domains of Language Use

To what extent there is a shift in domains depends on the area, but a lot can be said about the general shift in domains of the use of Evenki. In Russia Evenki is in most areas used in the limited domain and in the home domain among grandparents and other older family members. Most younger members of the family do not speak the language. A Senior Researcher at the Institute of Humanitarian Studies of Indigenous Peoples of the North, who is an Evenk himself states that there is no place for Evenki in society.

'Our language (Evenki) 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'.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ *The Ewenki Ethnic group* China Daily (15-10-2013). From: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2013-10/15/content_17032505.htm (9-7-2016).

¹³⁹ Ethnologue *Evenki* SIL International Publications (2016). From: <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/evn> (10-10-2016).

¹⁴⁰ Ethnologue *Evenki* SIL International Publications (2016). From: <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/evn/19> (10-10-2016).

¹⁴¹ UNESCO, 'Language vitality and endangerment', 9.

¹⁴² Sivtseva, 'The role of the new Evenkiness', 69.

Evenki is not the instruction language at schools, nor the common language in the locality. It is neither used for administrative purposes. There is indeed only a small domain available for Evenki, the home domain and in class during the Evenki classes. The language is used only in a very restricted number of domains and for very few functions. According to UNESCO factors the language is used in highly limited domains.

According to Janhunen Evenki in China still survives at community level in coherent speaking communities.¹⁴³ Interesting is the fact that the prestige of Evenki in China is rising gradually, possibly as a result of an increasing number of Evenki speakers appointed to official positions in the Evenki Autonomous Banner in Inner Mongolia.¹⁴⁴ This would indicate that there is at least more space for Evenki to maintain and develop and that the domain in which Evenki is spoken can be more expanded. However, the administration of the Evenk Autonomous Banner still functions in Chinese. Another example of the rising prestige of Evenki is the fact that since the beginning of 2011, the No. 1 Experimental Primary School in Evenk Autonomous Banner provides Evenki classes. The local education bureau tended to introduce Evenki lessons on all primary and secondary schools in the Evenk Autonomous Banner in the second half of 2011.¹⁴⁵ Even Mongolian children are sometimes supported by their parents to learn Evenki, according to Su Youle, the headmaster of the No.1 Experimental Primary School:

‘Evenki lessons have gained popularity among students, including Mongolian students with support and appreciation from their parents’.¹⁴⁶

Since 2011 the domain of use for Evenki has expanded as a result of Evenki lessons at all schools in the Evenk Autonomous Banner. The Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region has almost 190.000 cadres originating from minority groups.¹⁴⁷ Also in China is the language used in highly limited domains. It is probably spoken more intensively at the home domain, since the number of speakers on the Chinese side of the border is greater and has a stronger speech community in general.

¹⁴³ Janhunen, ‘Tungusic an endangered language’, 51.

¹⁴⁴ Ibidem, 51.

¹⁴⁵ Xinhua *Ethnic group revives near-extinct language* China Daily (29-4-2011). From: http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011-04/29/content_12424517.htm (9-7-2016).

¹⁴⁶ Ibidem (9-7-2016).

¹⁴⁷ *Ethnic minorities hold important posts* China Daily (05-01-2005). From: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/cndy/2005-01/05/content_405923.htm (10-5-2016).

Response to New Domains and Media

The vitality of a language is also shown in the way it responds to new domains and media. A vital language is able to integrate in the new domains and media such as radio, television, internet, social media and newspapers. Although nothing goes lost when a language is not able to respond to those new domains, it means that the already dominant language takes over the new domains and that the minority languages is not able to keep up with the dominant language.

In Russia Evenki is present in many new domains and media, although it remains limited per domain. In Evenkiia the local newspaper *Evenkiiskaia zhizn* is published once a week in Russian and Evenki, although the majority of the pages are written in Russian.¹⁴⁸ In the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) has a newspaper with only one page in Evenki. An Evenk from the Yakutia region says the following about the use and frequency of TV shows and radiobroadcast:

‘In fact, there is no context for the Evenki language use. There are few platforms to use Evenki, 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 channel. A version of the radio program “Gevan” is also broadcast once a week. A newspaper for the indigenous people of Yakutia is published once a month. Unfortunately, indigenous languages take up one page in it, the rest being published in Russian and Yakut’.¹⁴⁹

The use of the media in newspapers, radio and TV is covered, but is hardly worth mentioning since the use of Evenki remains very limited, although it is outstretched over many domains. There is even a film in which Evenki is spoken (Irkismondya the hero) of which Mira Sivtseva tells in her thesis that this epos is written by her great-grandfather.¹⁵⁰ It is also possible to learn Evenki through using the internet. An Evenk woman from the Sakha Republic told that her younger sister ‘now worries about the language loss, she downloads books and learns Evenki on her own’.¹⁵¹ For smartphones the application ЭВЭДЫ (Evenki) can be downloaded at Google Play for Android smartphones. It contains a Russian-Evenki dictionary and a phrasebook. At the moment the app has been downloaded 100 times. The websites evenkiteka.ru¹⁵² and

¹⁴⁸ Газета ‘Эвенкийская жизнь’ (2016). From: [http://www.evenkya.ru/infoeg/\(7-7-2016\)](http://www.evenkya.ru/infoeg/(7-7-2016)).

¹⁴⁹ Sivtseva, ‘The role of the new Evenkiness’, 69.

¹⁵⁰ Ibidem, 78.

¹⁵¹ Ibidem, 78.

¹⁵² Эвенкийская библиотека (2016). From: [http://evenkiteka.ru/\(5-7-2016\)](http://evenkiteka.ru/(5-7-2016)).

evengus.ru¹⁵³ make it possible for Evenki self-learners to learn Evenki. Some Evenki-speakers are also active on social media.

‘In the social network «VKontakte» we created a group with like-minded «Evenki», presently the most numerous <online> among the northern peoples of Russia. What is interesting, young people want to learn their native language, they are interested in their culture, the events in the life of the Evenki in Russia. If there is no language environment, the language should be given a new application. In the same social network, we greet each other «Мэнду» (*mendu*)...[...]...Now a version of the Russian-Evenki dictionary and tutorials for smartphones in android have been created”¹⁵⁴

The Evenks of Russia have found their way to the new media. Although the use is expanded over many territories within the new media and other domains, the actual use is limited. Often there is only one page in Evenki in the newspaper and very limited screen time on television. There are websites in Evenki, but their numbers are very small. According to the UNESCO criteria, Evenki in the new domains and media should be considered as receptive. This means the language is used in many new domains.¹⁵⁵ Since the language is used in many new domains but with a very limited amount, the status over ‘receptive’ is questionable.

In China the situation appears to be very different. Since no official written form of Evenki is available, it is not possible to have newspapers with news in written Evenki. Internet pages in Evenki, the use of social media in Evenki or smartphone applications for Evenki language learning are also not available in China as a result of the lack of a written language. There are no Chinese-Evenki dictionaries for language learning, nor programmes for beginning Evenki learners. All the mentioned domains require a written language. It is therefore questionable to what extent the not used domains are a lack of vitality, or merely a result of no developed language. Evenki in China does however have radio programmes and television shows. In the Evenk Autonomous banner this is provided by the Hulunbuir Evenk Autonomous Banner Radio & TV station.¹⁵⁶ According to the UNESCO criteria the use of Evenki in the new domains is ‘minimal’. Only a few new domains are used.

¹⁵³ *Материалы для изучения эвенкийского языка* эвенкийская библиотека (2007). From: <http://evengus.ru/> (7-9-2016).

¹⁵⁴ Sivtseva, ‘The role of the new Evenkiness’, 79.

¹⁵⁵ UNESCO, ‘Language vitality and endangerment’, 11.

¹⁵⁶ Hulunbuir Evenk Autonomous Banner Radio and TV Station (2016). From: <http://listings.findthecompany.com/1/49008427/Hulunbuir-Evenk-Autonomous-Banner-Radio-Tv-Station-in-Hulunbeier-China> (7-9-2016).

Availability of Materials for Language Education and Literacy

Languages are normally passed on by parents, but education in the language helps to maintain the language. In Russia education in Evenki is available, mostly as a subject and not as the instruction language. The availability of good instruction material has been a problem since written Evenki was first established. According to Grenoble and Whaley a new problem occurs where Evenki education is concerned. Nowadays Evenki is a shifting language, something the materials for Evenki-learning is not designed for. Language teaching has several approaches; it can be designed for foreign learners, as a second language or as a first language. Most pedagogic materials for the Evenki language are designed for learners who have some Evenki knowledge or speak it as a mother tongue.¹⁵⁷ Many children do not learn the language at home anymore, which means it is problematic for them to learn the language at school at a second or even first language. This claim by Whaley and Grenoble is supported by a student at the North-Eastern Federal University.

‘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’.¹⁵⁸

The existence of language materials is not the only criterion for a high vitality score where written educational materials are concerned. The written materials should also be used for to the maintenance of the language. This is not the case for children who do not speak Evenki as their mother tongue. The viability factor that is given to Evenki in Russia in this domain is as follows: ‘written materials exist and children may be exposed to the written form at school’.¹⁵⁹

In China is Evenki officially no written language. However, in 2010 the first Evenki language textbook was compiled as an attempt to preserve the language. The book was created commissioned by the government of the Evenk Autonomous Banner, at a cost of 200,000 yuan (comparable with 30,760 dollar). Since there is no official Evenki script, international phonetic signs are used, together with Chinese and Mongolian signs.¹⁶⁰ Before this recently published

¹⁵⁷ Sivtseva, ‘The role of the new Evenkiness’, 72.

¹⁵⁸ Ibidem, 72.

¹⁵⁹ UNESCO, ‘Language vitality and endangerment’, 12.

¹⁶⁰ Xinhua, *Ethnic group revives near-extinct language* China Daily (29-4-2011). From: http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011-04/29/content_12424517.htm (14-7-2016).

book there were no educational materials available. Until recently Evenki in China showed no vitality at this UNESCO factor of vitality. Now the vitality status for this factor can be defined as follows: 'a practical orthography is known to the community and some material is being written'.¹⁶¹ Although children are now also exposed to Evenki classes, the language is not written in an official script and uses only phonetic signs.

Governmental and Institutional Language Attitudes and Policies

In both Russia and China minority languages have the space to develop. They are in neither country a dominant language. In the case of China, the laws from 1991 like discussed in the former chapter are still in force. In 2008 newspapers brought the news that officials in China's minority group, the Han Chinese, should learn minority languages including Evenki, in order to understand the minority cultures better.¹⁶² Although it is unclear to what extent this idea is followed up, it shows a kind attitude towards minorities. The Evenk Autonomous Banner also showed an increasing number of Evenki speakers at official posts, which might indicate that the Chinese administration has a slightly positive attitude towards minority languages like Evenki. The already discussed government spending on Evenki language textbooks shows a clear effort to preserve the Evenki language.

In Russia the regional budget of the Republic Sakha has allocated 65 million rubbles for ethnic school financing in the period from 2012 to 2016.¹⁶³ Article 10, point 4 of the Rights of persons belonging to indigenous minorities pointed out that they shall have the right to receive and disseminate information in their native languages, create the media.

Although little is sure about the language attitudes, there seems to be no oppression of minority languages. The form of language policy that is nowadays applied looks in both cases most like differentiated support. Evenki is explicitly protected by the government, but there are clear differences in the contexts in which way the Chinese and Russian language and Evenki are used. The government encourages ethnolinguistic groups to maintain and use their languages, most often in private domains rather than in public domains.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ UNESCO, 'Language vitality and endangerment', 12.

¹⁶² B. Blanchard *China says must utilise minority cultures for development* Reuters (16-7-2015). From: <http://internal.uk.mobile.reuters.com/article/idUKKCN0PQ05520150716> (12-7-2016).

¹⁶³ Sivtseva, 'The role of the new Evenkiness', 73.

¹⁶⁴ UNESCO, 'Language vitality and endangerment', 13.

Community Members' Attitudes towards Their Own Language

A vital language is supported by the community members. Within a group there may exist many different attitudes towards a language. Some may support the language and have positive attitudes. It is also possible that members of a community are ashamed of the language or think they have better chances in life by supporting another dominant language. When the majority of the group has a positive attitude towards the language this will probably have a positive effect on the maintenance of the language. When a majority has negative attitudes towards the language, or even supports languages loss, this will harm the survival of the language.¹⁶⁵

The number of Evenki speakers in Russia is declining. The attitude of the Evenki speakers towards their own language is probably a factor in this decline. An interview with Evenk graduates from the Tura boarding school showed that Evenki is not popular among the youth:

‘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 are embarrassed. They feel like if you’re going someplace, they’re excluded’.¹⁶⁶

The shame for the Evenki language is often a result of the attitudes of the outside world. The language and the people were in the past seen as backwards, which probably still affects the temporary attitudes. An Evenki woman who does not speak Evenki herself tells:

‘I knew that we are Evenki, others also knew. At school, Yakut pupils got better support from teachers; we (Evenki) were always seen as people who were not supposed to be on the same level with them. They did not want us to be better than they were, to get better grades, for example. Ethnic equality was not present; moreover, it was impossible in a society where Evenki were seen as inferior’.¹⁶⁷

Stories of feeling inferior and being ashamed for the own language are often heard. Although the opinion or story of a single person does not count for all Evenks, it is possible that the feeling of shame is experienced more widely, since the number of Evenki speakers is declining. One Evenk even told that the negative reactions on her speaking Evenki was the reason for not

¹⁶⁵ UNESCO, ‘Language vitality and endangerment’, 13-14.

¹⁶⁶ Mamontova, ‘What language do real Evenki speak?’, 42.

¹⁶⁷ Sivtseva, ‘The role of the new Evenkiness’, 51.

speaking Evenki anymore. Local residents made fun of the way she spoke (Evenki) when she came to the district for an official case. After this negative attitude towards her speaking her native language, she preferred the use of Russian.¹⁶⁸ The feeling of inferiority and shame or the attitude of the outside world can all be reasons for a negative attitude towards the own language. Another reason for the abandonment of the own language is the future prospects of Evenk children. An Evenk parents has the following to say about the education of his 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 here, touch on some topic, discuss something. Even discuss problems at administrative level...[...]...to learn the conditions for getting accepted into higher education... Our graduates need to know how to be able to speak’.¹⁶⁹

This Evenk parent is convinced that the Russian language gives his children more possibilities in life. He makes an important point here. In order to be able to follow higher education or to deal with administrative questions, the Russian language is needed. One could argue that learning one language does not exclude mastering a second language. This Evenk parent is possibly afraid the learning Evenki will go at the expensive of Russian. There appears to be a widespread belief that extra hours of Evenki education will adversely affect the knowledge of Russian.¹⁷⁰

Other Evenks want to maintain their language and because they think it is important to preserve their identity. An Evenk who is optimistic about the idea that most Evenks consider it positive when another member of the Evenk groups speaks the language.

‘No Evenki will say to you that you are not proficient in your mother tongue. Every single Evenki will support you in your beginnings. You can speak it wrong but, it is better than not to speak it at all, we are happy with what we have’.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ Mamontova, ‘What language do real Evenki speak?’, 56.

¹⁶⁹ Ibidem, 42.

¹⁷⁰ Sivtseva, ‘The role of the new Evenkiness’, 74.

¹⁷¹ Ibidem, 78.

Some Evenks might be glad with every speaker, even though they do not speak Evenki fluently. Other Evenks simply don't care. An elder Evenk experienced lack of interest among the Evenk people about the preservation of their language.

'You know how many times I have been to Evenki villages? During the last twenty years I was going there in order to collect data for my work. When I asked them why they did not want to teach Evenki language, why they did not organize any extra courses, they simply replied "What for?"¹⁷²

Evenki in Russia clearly suffers from a negative attitude from the outside and towards the own language and maybe even a complete lack of interest, although a few examples have showed that these sometime reinforce each other.

About the attitudes of Evenks in China little is known. In earlier parts of this chapter Chinese Evenks stated that the language should be more protected, or showed their regret for the fact that (their) children no longer spoke the language (fluently). Since the number of speakers among the total population is greater than that of the Russian Evenks, this could be an indication that the attitudes in China towards Evenki are more positive than in Russia. The new Evenki classes are enthusiastically received by Ao Cheng, a 10-year-old Evenk boy in the Evenk Autonomous Banner. He proudly tells:

'I can teach a little Ewenki language to my family now. I can sing Ewenki songs now as my grandma does, and I like these beautiful songs'.¹⁷³

Type and Quality of Documentation

Documentation in the language is the last factor in the search for the vitality of languages. Good documentation helps the maintenance of languages and provide endangered languages a chance to survive. In Russia the website evenkiteka.ru provides the reader of Evenki with a proper number of works in Evenki. Books with titles like Эвенкийские героические сказания (Evenk heroic tales) and Eda ələ terudu vəjʊməciwkə (Why hunt in life?), but also dictionaries and

¹⁷² Sivtseva, 'The role of the new Evenkiness', 53.

¹⁷³ Xinhua, *Ethnic group revives near-extinct language* China Daily (29-4-2011). From: http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011-04/29/content_12424517.htm (14-7-2016).

learning books for children.¹⁷⁴ Portions of the bible are available in Evenki¹⁷⁵, and so is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.¹⁷⁶ Several grammar books of Evenki are available, like *Evenki*, the work of Igor Nedjalkov, which gives an extended grammatical overview in English with an Evenki vocabulary. Most of the grammar books however appeared with Russian translations and explanation.

Only as a spoken language, Evenki had the right to exist. The website [evenkiteka.ru](http://www.evenkiteka.ru) also sells books for Chinese Evenks, for example *Ewengki nihang bilehu biteg*, an Evenki-Chinese dictionary and *Ewengki gisong*, a book for Chinese Evenk children in Inner-Mongolia.¹⁷⁷ Since there is no official script for Chinese Evenks it is unclear in which script the so-called Chinese Evenki is written. Sometimes the Mongolian alphabet is used for Chinese Evenki,¹⁷⁸ although this is experimental and no official writing system and the Latin script is also used in very limited cases.

The vitality of Evenki in Russia and China

In the comparison of Evenki in Russia and China, and the vitality factors it is striking that they score significant on different factors. The only factors where Evenki in China shows more viability are the number of speakers, the number of speakers in the total population and the communities attitudes towards their own language. Although Evenki is a written language in Russia and it shows more vitality in the media and educational domain, it has a smaller speech community with a less positive attitude towards the own language.

Although both languages can be considered severely endangered, the endangerment for both countries lies in other factors. In China the speech community appears to be more strong than in Russia. A more positive attitude towards the language might be a contribution to this stronger speech community. But in case the speech community in China would decrease in a very short time, there are hardly written materials available to support or revive the language. In Russia the opposite could become a problem. Russia has a limited number of written materials, which contains grammar books, educational material and even a small number of written folktales. A language however needs speakers and the language can't be maintained by books alone. The case of Russia made however clear that a written language does not prevent a language from becoming endangered, although the language can help maintaining a language.

¹⁷⁴ *Эвенкийская библиотека* (2016). From: <http://www.evenkiteka.ru/languages/evenki//> (5-7-2016).

¹⁷⁵ Ethnologue *Evenki* SIL International Publications (2016). From: <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/evn> (10-5-2016).

¹⁷⁶ http://unicode.org/udhr/d/udhr_evn.txt

¹⁷⁷ *Эвенкийская библиотека* (2016). From: <http://www.evenkiteka.ru/languages/evenki//> (5-7-2016).

¹⁷⁸ P.T. Daniels and W.Bright, *The World's Writing Systems* (1996) 545.

5. The effects of the Soviet and Chinese language policy

In the previous chapter the vitality of Evenki on both sides of the Chinese-Russian border has been discussed and analysed, using the UNESCO factors defining language vitality. Although Evenki can be considered ‘severely endangered’ on both sides of the mutual border, Evenki in China shows different markers of vitality than Evenki in Russia. The mutual ‘severely endangered’ status is a result of the fact that Evenki in China and Russia scores low or average for most of the vitality factors. The decline in Evenki speakers in Russia has taken place during the Soviet period and afterwards. A similar development took place in the People’s Republic of China. The vitality has decreased in both countries during and after the twentieth century. The current vitality status is outlined on the following page in Table 1, ranked by factor, based on the results of the previous chapter. This chapter discusses to what extent the current language viability is a result of the earlier discussed language policies of the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China. Since the language policy in China appeared to be different than the language policy in the Soviet Union, there is also the question to what extent the current differences in language use in China and Russia are connected to differences in language policy.

Similarities in the Evenki language situation in Russia and China

The current language situation in Russia and China has many similarities. Table 1 shows that the ‘intergenerational language transmission is heading the same way in Russia and China. There is a slight difference in the generations who still speak Evenki, in Russia the grandparental generation and up (severely endangered) and in China the parental generation and up (definitely endangered). Nevertheless, the language in both countries is no longer passed on to children, which has a negative effect on the intergenerational language transmission. The youngest speakers of Evenki are in general those belonging to the parental generation, those of 30 years and older. The language policies of the People’s Republic of China and the Soviet Union have contributed to the fact that Evenki is no longer passed on to children. The role of Russian and Mandarin Chinese as the most important language was possibly a factor in this development. From the late 1930s the Soviet Union actively promoted the use of Russian as the national language, later Russian became even obligatory and an instruction language at schools. The late 1950s in China showed a similar development. Mandarin Chinese was to promoted under children in primary and secondary schools. The fact that the children in both countries were educated in the ‘national language’ could have led to the abandonment of the native language. Parents in Russia and China argue that they want their children to learn respectively

Table 1: Current Evenki language situation according to UNESCO factors

Factors	Russia	China
1	Severely endangered: the language is used mostly by the grandparental generation and up.	Definitively endangered: the language is used mostly by the parental generation and up.
2	4,800 speakers.	11,000 speakers.
3	Critically endangered, few speak the language; 12.5% (4,800 speakers out of 38,400).	Severely endangered, a minority speaks the language; 36% (11,000 speakers out of 30,875).
4	Used in formal or limited domains. The language may still be used at the community centre, at festivals and at ceremonial occasions. At home grandparents and other older extended family members reside and speak the language. Many younger people can understand the language but cannot speak it.	Used in dwindling domains. The non-dominant language loses ground. Parents begin to use the dominant language at home in their everyday interactions with their children. Parents and older members speak and understand both the dominant and indigenous languages. Bilingual children may exist in families where the indigenous language is actively used.
5	The language is used in many new domains (radio, TV, newspapers, social media and internet).	The language is used only in a few new domains (radio and TV).
6	Written materials exist and children may be exposed to the written form at school. Literacy is not promoted through print media.	A practical orthography is known to the community and some material is being written (limited use of Evenki in Mongolian and Latin script. Officially Evenki is no written language in China).
7	Passive assimilation; The dominant group is indifferent as to whether or not minority languages are spoken, as long as the dominant group's language is the language of interaction. The dominant group's language is the official language. Most domains of non-dominant language use do not enjoy high prestige.	Passive assimilation; The dominant group is indifferent as to whether or not minority languages are spoken, as long as the dominant group's language is the language of interaction. The dominant group's language is the official language. Most domains of non-dominant language use do not enjoy high prestige.
8	Only a few members support language maintenance; others are indifferent or may even support language loss.	Some members support language maintenance; others are indifferent or may even support language loss.
9	There is one good grammar and a number of adequate grammars, dictionaries, texts and literature.	Limited material exists, such as an Evenki-Chinese dictionary. Evenki is here written in Mongolian script.

UNESCO factors; 1: Intergenerational language transmission, 2: Absolute number of speakers, 3: Proportion of speakers within the total, 4: Shifts in domains of language use, 5: Response to new domains and media, 6: Availability of materials for language education and literacy 7: Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies, 8: Community Members' Attitudes towards Their Own Language, 9: Type and quality of documentation

Russian and Mandarin-Chinese to give them better chances at (higher) education. This also does not contribute to more young Evenki speakers.

An argument that is often used to explain the language loss in Russia are the Soviet boarding schools. Numerous boarding schools were created for native children. They lived at the schools for nine months a year, where they spoke mostly Russian. During the summer they lived with their parents and there they could speak their native languages again.¹⁷⁹ Many Evenks claim that boarding schools are to blame for the loss of Evenki. They speak about the long period away from the Evenki speaking community and the experience that they were prohibited to speak the language.¹⁸⁰ An Evenk who went to a boarding school during the Soviet period told the following about his period at the boarding school:

‘When we came back home to summer holidays, it was hard to speak Evenki. We were retrained, nine months we spoke only Yakut and Russian. At school, when we tried to speak our mother tongue, they (the teachers) beat us, we sometimes fought with Yakut children, because they bullied us, but then we were punished again. Our parents lived in an Evenki-Yakut village, everyone spoke Yakut, in the end we stopped speaking Evenki’.¹⁸¹

Nothing is said about a rule that forbade them to speak Evenki. Nevertheless, the teachers hit the Evenk children when they spoke their native language. Some scholars claim that the phrase ‘we were prohibited from speaking Evenki’ should not be taken literally. The discrimination against Evenk children and the lack of prestige of their language compared with Russian were probably the reason they did not feel free to speak Evenki.¹⁸² Although the boarding school system is not the only reason for the decreased language use of Evenki, it has probably played a major role in the rapid language decline of Evenki in Russia during and after the Soviet period. The Evenks who did not go to boarding schools, born before the period of 1930-1940, in general speak Russian fluently. The following generations showed a decline in the number of Evenki speakers. The parents who were not fluent Evenki speakers as a result of Russian education and being at a boarding school, probably had more difficulties passing the language on to their

¹⁷⁹ Grenoble, ‘Language policy and the loss of Tungusic languages’, 376.

¹⁸⁰ Mamontova, ‘What language do real Evenki speak?’, 44.

¹⁸¹ Sivtseva, ‘The role of the new Evenkiness’, 43.

¹⁸² Mamontova, ‘What language do real Evenki speak?’, 44.

children. The Soviet language policy has at least contributed to the decline of intergenerational language transmission in Russia.

The Cultural Revolution, a period of oppression for all minority languages, including Evenki, is an obvious malefactor of language policy which led to the decline of language vitality of Evenki in China. Sometimes it was even forbidden to sing folksongs in minority languages.¹⁸³ Chinese Evenks only had an oral tradition to fall back on. Although no data can be found about the number of speakers before and after the Cultural Revolution, so no definitive conclusions can be drawn, it seems logical that in a vulnerable group such as the Chinese Evenks, the language use has declined in this period. The data of the 1990 census showed that 70% of the Evenks spoke Evenki.¹⁸⁴ In 1995 the percentage of Evenki speakers was approximately 67%.¹⁸⁵ Nowadays the percentage of Evenki speakers has halved to 36%. The children who grew up in the period of the Cultural Revolution, when the use of minority languages was prohibited, are the nowadays parents who hardly pass on Evenki to their children. It is possible that the effects of the Cultural Revolution are visible only in the present time. If one generation is lost, the effects seem at first limited. When this generation overwhelmingly stops to pass the language on to their children, the decline of speakers accelerates faster than in the starting period.

The 'governmental and institutional languages attitudes' in Russia and China have a comparable status. Both countries conduct a language policy of passive assimilation. In China and Russia is the dominant language respectively Mandarin-Chinese and Russian. The dominant language is spoken by most Evenks, but they are not prohibited to speak Evenki. This language policy is similar to that of the communist rule of both countries, where the dominant language was mostly used in the public domain. At the same time minority languages such as Evenki received some support, although the degree of support depended on the period. The current language policy is largely a continuation of the language policy from earlier times. However, a small difference needs to be noted. In the past the Soviet Union was more actively supportive than the People's Republic of China. The Soviet Union created a written form of Evenki and created the possibility to educate children in Evenki, whereas China did no such thing. In the present time China is more actively supporting Evenki. Since 2011 children in the Evenk Autonomous Banner have the possibility to learn Evenki at school, an Evenki textbook

¹⁸³ Lam, *Language education in China*, 127.

¹⁸⁴ Zhou, *Multilingualism in China*, 25.

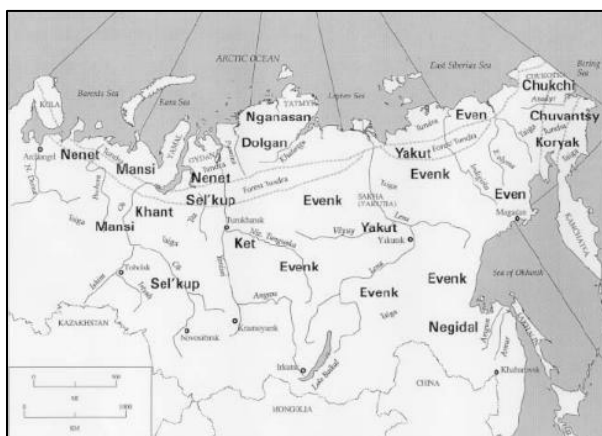
¹⁸⁵ Ethnologue *Archive* SIL International Publications (2016). From: <http://www.archive.ethnologue.com> (10-10-2016).

is recently created and Evenki speakers are more often accepted at higher positions. These measures are gradually increasing the Evenki language status. In both countries Russian and Mandarin-Chinese remain the dominant language and the support for Evenki is minimal.

The ‘shift in domains of language use’ in Russia and China is in some respects comparable. Although in China the type of domains in which the language is active can be described as ‘dwindling domains’, while in Russia this can be seen as ‘limited and formal domains’ (table 1), in both cases the dominant language covers most domains. In Russia the Evenki language is even limited spoken at the home domain, almost exclusively by older family members. In China also younger family members (parental age) use the language at home, although they do not often speak Evenki with their children. In both countries Evenki is not represented in many domains, although in China the presence of Evenki in school domain is a recent development. In China it looks like Evenki is gaining more territory and the vitality of Evenki is here greater than in Russia. However, both countries show only a small presence of Evenki in the different domains. Although there are no direct language policies concerned with the small number of domains in which Evenki is to be found, the communist way of life might have contributed to this development. In Russia and China forced collectivization took place. Evenks in both countries had to give up their sedentary life in this period and had to settle on the so-called state farms. This led to the mixing of different peoples, who were placed in state farms together. The only mutual language was probably the dominant language. It is also likely that the administration was also based on the dominant language. The communist way of life has probably influenced the different domains.

Differences in the Evenki vitality in Russia and China

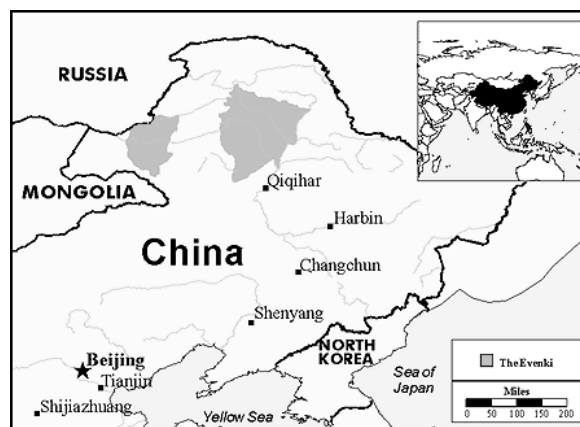
A striking difference between the Russian and Chinese Evenks is the comparison of the number of speakers, 4,800 in Russia and 11,000 in China. Even more striking is the difference in the



Map 2: Spread of Russian Evenks

proportion of speakers within the total, respectively 12,5% and 36%. There are many possible explanations for this difference. The earlier discussed effects of the boarding schools and the Cultural Revolution can be a reason for this difference. Although both prevented the passing on of the language to younger generations, the period of the Soviet boarding schools spanned a greater period

(from the 1930s until now) than the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). The effects of the longer period and an earlier start of the boarding schools compared with the duration of the Cultural Revolution could have led to the different number of speakers and a different percentage of speakers on both sides of the Chinese-Russian border. The longer a period of minimal language use spans, the greater the effects will be. Another contribution to the fact that there are less Russian Evenks who speak Evenki than Chinese Evenks is the spread of Evenks through both countries. Map 2¹⁸⁶ shows the dispersion of Evenks through Siberia (Russia). When the living area of the Evenks in Russia is compared to that of the Chinese Evenks (map 3)¹⁸⁷ it becomes clear that the Evenks in Russia are more widespread through the country and occupy a greater area. In China the Evenks live in a more concentrated area. The more widely dispersion of the Russian Evenks can be an explanation for the fact that Russia has a significant lower percentage of Evenki speakers than China. In areas where Evenks are surrounded by great numbers of peoples speaking another language, it is likely that they adopted the dominant language, in order to be able to communicate with speakers of other languages. The greater density of the Chinese Evenks in a specific area might be the reason for a greater and more vital speech community.



Map 3: Spread of Chinese Evenks

When looking at the ‘response to new domains and media’, table 1 shows a difference between Russia and China. In Russia, Evenki is more strongly represented in the media and new domains, such as Radio, TV, newspapers and internet. Evenki in China is only present in the standard media, such as TV and radio, on a very limited level. This difference can be explained by the different decisions made in the period of the different language policies. To use Evenki on the internet, on social media or in newspapers, it has to be a written language. In Russia this is the case, in China there is no official widely acknowledged written language. The language policy of the Soviet Union has clearly contributed to more vitality where media and other new domains such as internet are concerned, since this language policy has promoted literacy and created a written form of Evenki. The choice made by China not to create a written form of Evenki limited the use of the language to the spoken media. Chinese Evenki is not represented in the written media or new domains, which led to a lower vitality in this domain

¹⁸⁶ From: <https://nl.pinterest.com/pin/194428908891823074/> (10-7-2016).

¹⁸⁷ From: <https://nl.pinterest.com/pin/194428908891822970/> (10-7-2016).

for Evenki in China compared to the situation in Russia. The language policy in both countries clearly influenced the current situation in the media and new domains.

The choices made as a part of the Chinese and Soviet language policy concerning the written language have also affected the available ‘type and quality of documentation’. The choice for a written form of Evenki in Soviet Russia led to the currently available grammar books, dictionaries and literature. In China there have been some recent attempts to create a written language, which has led to a Chinese-Evenki dictionary in Mongolian script, but there is hardly any documentation available since this form of written Evenki is not officially recognised. The difference in the available documentation is a direct result of the language policies and the different directions they chose for Evenki within their borders. However, it needs to be taken into account that the Evenks in China also did not create a literary language for themselves. The creation of a written form is not only a responsibility of the Chinese government, but also that of the Chinese Evenks themselves.

Another effect of the different policies concerning the written form of Evenki is the dissimilarity between Russia and China where the ‘availability of materials for language education and literacy’ is concerned. While Russia has education material in Evenki and a limited number of books written in Evenki, China only recently published an Evenki textbook. This textbook is not written in an official Chinese Evenki script, but is compiled with international phonetic signs along with Mongolian and Chinese.¹⁸⁸ There is an extremely limited number of books in Evenki with a non-official script available in China. However, Russia has a greater number of written education material as a result of the written form of Evenki established by the Soviet Union and the fact that Evenki has been a subject at Russian schools in specific areas since the late 1920s. However, it needs to be mentioned that the written Evenki language and the written materials are not accepted by all Evenks in Russia. The southern dialect was chosen for the literary language, but the chosen dialect for the literary language led to recognition problems within the Evenk groups. Dialects of the same language are normally mutually intelligible but often differ on base of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. In the case of Evenki in Russia vocabulary and pronunciation appear to be the greatest difference between the three main groups of dialects.¹⁸⁹

Misunderstandings based on vocabulary often originate in the different meanings of the same word in different Evenki dialects. An example of this is the word *chipkan*, which means

¹⁸⁸ Xinhua *Ethnic group revives near-extinct language* China Daily (29-4-2011). From: http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011-04/29/content_12424517.htm (9-7-2016).

¹⁸⁹ Grenoble, ‘Language policy and the loss of Tungusic languages’, 377.

respectively ‘sable’, ‘bear’, ‘duck, or ‘any animal’ in different dialects. Pronunciation or phonetics also differs between the different dialects. The most characteristic is the /s/~h/difference. Words beginning with an *s* in the southern and eastern dialects, begin with an *h* in the northern dialects. In this case the word ‘fox’ is pronounced as *sulaki* in eastern and southern dialects. Northern dialects pronounce the same word with an *h*, which means that the same word ‘fox’ is pronounced as *hulaki*.¹⁹⁰ The Evenks with different dialects do understand each other but do however see differences. A Northern Evenk said the following about the Southern dialect:

“I call southern Evenki ‘Latins’—they’ve got a Latin language, a literary one. Here it’s the purest one. On the whole I don’t even consider the southerners to be Evenki. They’re trying to revive the culture now, but they’re doing it all wrong. After all, they’ve got different traditions”.¹⁹¹

Although Russian Evenki is generally seen as one language with different dialects, the Northern Evenk from the above citation points out that he does not see Southern Evenks as Evenks. The dialectical differences are considered unbridgeable by some Evenks. Although the opinion of one person is not always representative for the whole group, most Northern dialect speaking Evenks see the written Evenki as the literary language, without them being able to identify with it completely.¹⁹² The absence of bonding between different dialectical Evenks does however not help the language to maintain. This is a result of the Soviet language policy and while the Soviet Union has made an effort to maintain the Evenki language by creating a written language, at the same time the maintenance of the language was undermined by this dialect of the written language, since not all Evenki speakers consider this dialect a form of Evenki.

When comparing the ‘community members’ attitudes towards their own language’ it looks like the Chinese Evenks have a more positive attitude towards their own language than the Russian Evenks. In China more Evenks support language maintenance and they show more regret for the declining number of speakers. The former chapter showed that many Evenks in Russia faced discrimination during the Soviet period. Although this is not an effect of the Soviet language policy, the fact that Evenki was not given a high status in society might have developed an attitude of inferiority from the inside (Evenks) and the outside (other groups). The

¹⁹⁰ I. Nedjalkov, *Evenki* (1997) XX.

¹⁹¹ Atknine, ‘The Evenki language from Yenisei to Sakhalin’, 65.

¹⁹² Mamontova, ‘What language do real Evenki speak?’ 63.

already discussed more widely dispersion of Russian Evenks can have led to smaller groups of Evenki speakers within communities, which might have exposed the Evenki speakers to discrimination and an inability to speak their own language for daily use. Since the career chances for just Evenki speakers are limited to reindeer herding, while Russian speakers have a chance to follow higher education, the Evenki language has lost ground. Although the same conditions are applicable for Chinese for Chinese education, there is a stronger motivation to maintain the language. There is no evidence to be found about discrimination, although that does not necessarily mean that it did not occur in the past. There seems to be an indirect relation with the communist language policy in both cases. The status that was given to the language and the possibility to speak the language, have probably shaped the attitude of the Evenki speakers towards their own language. Although the support in Russia is limited, in a community in Evenkiia is trying to revive the Evenki language, through a traditional reindeer herding life. They are convinced that Evenki is preserved better in a community with a traditional way of life, combined with Evenki education.¹⁹³

¹⁹³ Mamontova, 'What language do real Evenki speak?', 38-39.

Conclusion

From 1917 onwards the Soviet Union started a language policy based on the communist ideas about equality. In 1949 China followed the Soviet Union with the establishment of a communist administration and a language policy based on the same ideas. Soon the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China went their own way and this schism between the two countries included a different line in language policy. Evenks on both side of the border had to deal with the language policies, which went in two different ways from the 1960s. Language policy can be of great influence on the viability of a language and therefore the question of this research is how the language policy in Soviet Russia and Communist China has influenced the viability of the Evenki language in both countries

The language policies of the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China have had a great influence on the Evenki language, its vitality and its viability. Although the starting point in both countries was comparable, later they followed different paths where language policy was concerned. Despite the different paths both countries followed, roughly three periods can be distinguished; a period of support, a period of oppression and a period of rehabilitation. The language policy influenced many aspects of the language, intended and unintentional. One of greatest differences between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China is the creation of a written language, which happened in the Soviet Union, but not in Communist China. This appears to be at the core of the most differences between the analysed UNESCO factors for both countries. Russia shows more vitality on all points where the written language is represented. It is striking that despite more documentation, literature and education materials, the speech community in China appears to be stronger. Chinese Evenki appears to be more vital in all domains where the vitality of the speech community is measured. This difference made clear that a written form of the language is not necessary for a speech community to maintain.

The language status of Evenki in both countries is 'severely endangered'. This status would indicate that the language situation in China and Russia is the same. Although they share a same status, there are many differences between both countries. Although some differences have nothing to do with language policy at all, most differences in language vitality in Russia and China are a direct or indirect result of the measures as a part of the different language policies. Besides the creation of a written language the Soviet system of the boarding schools and the Chinese Cultural Revolution have at least contributed to language loss, especially in the younger generations. The number of speakers and the percentage of speakers have declined in China and Russia. The language still has vitality, although stronger in China, but is threatened.

The previous chapters showed that both language policies have contributed to less vitality. However, the Soviet Union has contributed more to the loss of vitality than China, despite more effort to maintain the language like written Evenki and Evenki education. The difference in dialects and the reaction of some Northern and Eastern Evenks on the chosen form for the written language does not contribute to the viability of the language, despite the fact that the documentation of language normally strengthens the chances of survival. The disunity of Evenks about the written language will likely not contribute to the learning of Evenki by children with another than a Southern accent. With a declining speech community, the chances to survive for Evenki in Russia are declining. Although the community in Evenkiia attempts to revive the Evenki language.¹⁹⁴ In China the Evenki language has greater chances of survival since the speech community is stronger and the language receives more positive attitudes. Since 2011 there is a positive development. Evenki is now taught at schools and a textbook has been created. Even some non-Evenki children living in the Evenk Autonomous Banner receive Evenki education, which indicates positive attitudes towards Evenki by other peoples.

The viability of Evenki has been highly influenced by both language policies. In general language policy in both countries has contributed to language loss. At the same time the Soviet Union has created a written language, which strengthens the language viability, since a written form of the language helps the maintenance of Evenki. The choice of dialect may cause some disunity, but this does not counterbalance the fact that a written language contributes to language viability. China shows more viability, especially with the new attempts to support the language. The declining Evenki language should also be seen in the light of the changing world with dying languages as a result of globalism. Although the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China may have contributed to language loss, the Soviet language policy has given the Evenki speaking people at least some tools to survive in a changing world, where many languages are threatened or already extinct. The Chinese language policy largely let Evenki develop without much interference, except for a short period. The effect is a stronger speech community than in Russia. Russian Evenki is leading in the written domains, while Chinese Evenki is leading in the spoken domain. Unfortunately, it seems that the Evenks across borders are hardly aware of each other. United they could possibly strengthen the language, which can possibly lead to a more viable language.

¹⁹⁴ Mamontova, 'What language do real Evenki speak?', 38-39.

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