

The role of the new Evenkiness in the Evenki language revitalization: the case of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia)

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revitalization: the case of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), Russia**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is devoted to the awakened indigenous identity of the Evenki people and its role in the Evenki language revitalization in the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), Russia. My personal experience of being an indigenous person in a multiethnic and multilingual society has become the main driving force for writing this thesis. I have personally experienced a rediscovery of my ethnic identity during the research process.

Most indigenous languages in Russia are endangered; the Evenki language is not an exception. This study examines the reasons for the Evenki language shift and loss, the development of the Evenki ethnic identity in the USSR and Russia, and the role of the new Evenkiness in the Evenki language revival. Through ten semi-structured and unstructured interviews with representatives of three Evenki generations, the study examines their experiences of being Evenki in the multicultural state.

The main finding of this thesis is the interconnection between what I call a new Evenki ethnic identity (new Evenkiness) and the willingness of the Evenki people to revitalize their mother tongue. Thus, the Evenki who feel the awakening of their indigenous ethnic identity feel the responsibility for their native language and its vitality. Among the factors which have informed the emergence of the new Evenkiness are interconnectedness and exchange of experiences with other indigenous peoples, participation in indigenous forums, conferences, and, last but not least, the formation of the new state of the Russian Federation.

Key words: indigenous ethnic identity, Evenki, new Evenkiness, language revitalization, mother tongue, ethnic revitalization

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 TOPIC PRESENTATION

My grandparents are Evenki from the Aldan region of The Republic Sakha (Yakutia) in the Far East of Russia¹. They are from the Buta clan² and they were reindeer herders. My great-grandmother was the last person in my family who could speak Evenki. My grandmother stopped speaking Evenki when she was a child at a boarding school. Now I feel sorry for not being more insistent in asking my great-grandmother more questions about the life of Evenki and not recording her stories about their lives, culture, and traditional knowledge.

My great-grandmother was the wife of the last singer of Evenki epos - Nikolay Trofimov (Nukuchan), my great-grandfather. He wrote down several tales of the epos of Evenki, Nimngakan, before he died in 1971. His works are still being published and are considered the most significant written heritage of Evenki culture (Bykova and Varlamova, 2008). The bitterness about not being able to speak my mother tongue, the stories about the suppression of Evenki children in boarding schools, and the discrimination in villages where Evenki were forced to move, made me realize how hard and important it is to struggle for one's identity and own culture. I feel a personal responsibility for the history of my people and the necessity to contribute to its continuation, since I have an opportunity to do so through my Master's thesis.

Indigenous people in Russia have experienced a dramatic loss of their mother tongue since the beginning of the twentieth century when the Soviet Union was established. Thus, according to the census in 1897, 53% of the Evenki spoke their mother tongue, while now it is spoken by only 6-11% of the Evenki people³. On the other hand, the level of literacy had

¹ Evenki are one the 47 so-called small-numbered indigenous people of Russia, terms "small-numbered indigenous people" aka "numerically small indigenous people" of Russia have origins from Tsarist Russia when the aboriginal population of Siberia and other parts of present-day Russia started to be colonized, see also p. 28

² Buta - an ancient Evenki word meaning «a good hunter»

³ Online portal of Association of the small-numbered indigenous peoples of Yakutia, published 07.05.2015
<http://yakutiakmns.org/archives/3423>

increased from 44.1% in 1920 to 87 % in 1939 due to liquidation of illiteracy policy in the Soviet Union (Strazny, 2004). Nevertheless, despite the fact that minorities' languages had gotten a written form and many indigenous peoples had acquired education, however, the decline in the use of the mother tongue is clear. In this thesis I will examine how the ethnic identity of the Evenki people in Russia has been developing and how Evenki people articulate their identity today. Moreover, I will analyze the role of the new Evenki identity, which I call the new Evenkiness, in the process of the Evenki language revitalization. There are two concepts in this thesis that will be introduced and defined: **mother tongue** and **identity**.

Mother tongue (native language, own language) is defined in many ways depending on the discipline and the concrete situations of people's language use and the social climate where they live. In my thesis, I will use the internal identification criterion of the mother tongue which refers to "the language one identifies with" (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981: 18). According to Skutnabb-Kangas (1981), a Finnish pedagogue and linguist, the author of "*Bilingualism or not: The education of minorities*", mother tongue can change up to several times in a lifetime. Within the context of this thesis I will refer to the Evenki language as the mother tongue of people who identify themselves as Evenki.

Identity is a complex phenomenon consisting of age, interests, friends and family, choices, values and beliefs, work and hobbies, ethnicity etc. In this thesis identity will be discussed from both personal and social perspectives, and the notion of ethnic identity will be used most frequently. Indigenous people's ethnic identity has been subject to marginalization and assimilation and now is rediscovering its indigenous roots (Minde, 2008). In my thesis I present a new phenomenon - the new Evenki identity, or new Evenkiness⁴. The new Evenkiness is an awakened Evenki identity mostly present among younger people. Phenomenon of the old and the new Evenkiness will be elaborated in this thesis with an emphasis on intergenerational relationships, contemporary political circumstances and social environment. The Evenkiness I discuss in this thesis is related to those Evenki who have experienced sedentarization, residential schools, assimilation into the mainstream society, and the language shift⁵. In order to analyze the intergenerational transmission of the Evenkiness within the context of this thesis I use my own concepts of the Stolen Generation, the Lost Generation, and Generation Hope. These concepts will be used in the analytical chapters where they are given definitions and examples.

⁴ The term "Evenkiness" was first used by Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov (1998), David G. Anderson (2000)

⁵ Language shift is a term first introduced by Fishman (1966), means "the replacement of one language by another as the primary means of communication and socialization within a community" (cited in Potowski 2013)

1.1 INTRODUCTION OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND AREA

I carried out my fieldwork in Yakutsk, the capital of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) from June 16th through July 17th of 2014, and from March 7th through March 30th 2015. The main aim of the fieldwork was to interview Evenki people working with Evenki language issues and officials working with and for the Evenki. Furthermore, I needed to obtain textual data from libraries and statistical services which are not available from abroad. I also visited various institutions and social gatherings of Evenki youth.



Figure 1. Autonomous areas in Russia

The Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) is one of the 85 federal subjects of the Russian Federation. There are five small-numbered indigenous people in Yakutia: Yukaghir, Chukchi, Dolgan, Even, and Evenki; the majority of the population is Russians and Yakut people⁶. According to the Federal Law №82-FZ, small-numbered indigenous people of the Far North are peoples living in the territories of the traditional settlement of their ancestors, preserving

⁶ National census of the Russian Federation 2010 URL: http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/Documents/Vol4/pub-04-04.pdf

the traditional way of life, livelihoods and crafts, numbering in the Russian Federation less than 50 thousand people and identifying themselves as separate ethnic communities⁷.

Research questions

The goal of this study is to explore the role of the new Evenki identity in the Evenki language revitalization in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). In order to achieve this goal I have formulated the following questions:

1. Which factors have informed the formation of the new Evenki identity: the new Evenkiness?
2. Does the new Evenki identity affect the Evenki language revitalization process, and if so, how?

1.2 METHODS AND DATA

I have chosen interviews, text analysis and auto-ethnography as the main methods of data gathering.

Interview. I conducted ten interviews from the 8th of May to the 6th of July, 2014. Some of my informants live in places other than Yakutsk, and therefore three interviews were conducted via Skype in Tromsø. After signing a consent form with the informants and acquiring permission to use the gathered data, five in-depth, semi-structured interviews were recorded with a hand-held recorder. The rest five unstructured conversations were not recorded. According to Chilisa, unstructured interviews allow for flexibility and make it possible for the researcher to follow the interests and thoughts of the informants (2012: 205). The main planned questions were:

1. Do you speak (write, read) Evenki? How did you learn it/how did you keep it?
2. Why did you begin to learn or be interested in Evenki language/history/culture?
3. How is Evenki language taught at schools and universities?
4. How are indigenous issues (e.g. language loss) treated by the government at local levels? At schools, in communities, and in families?
5. Do you see any changes in activities concerning own language/culture among the Evenki?

⁷ Article 1, Federal Law №82-FZ “About the guarantees for the rights of the small-numbered indigenous people of the Russian Federation from the 30.04.1999” text URL: <http://constitution.garant.ru/act/right/180406/>

6. If so, what kind of changes do you see and how do people show their interest?

7. What can be done in order to keep the Evenki language vital?

Informants. All the informants are studying and/or working with indigenous issues, particularly with Evenki. Since the aim of my study is to explore new “Evenkiness” and its role in language revitalization, I chose to interview people who have an interest in Evenki language or are related to it. My choice of informants was based on their interest in the Evenki language. From the perspective of age and experience that my potential informants might bear, I sought informants born in the 1930s-1940s, their children born in the 1950s-1960s, and grandchildren born in the 1980s-1990s. I was fortunate in finding two or three informants from each of the groups. In fact, some informants found me when they learned I was working on the Evenki language.

Indigenous auto-ethnography or “native” method of inquiry. I found important to include in the methodology my own experience, which I have never before counted as very relevant or reliable. In order to understand identity development and an indigenous identity articulation in a multicultural environment, I used the awakening of my own indigenous identity as a guide. Paul Whitinui, an indigenous researcher from University of Otago, New Zealand, argues for “the importance of considering indigenous autoethnography as another preferred “Native” method of inquiry in indigenous research” (Whitinui, 2013: 5).

Linda Smith Tuhiwai, a Maori researcher from New Zealand, contends:

“Engaging in a discussion about research as an indigenous issue has been about finding a “voice,” or a way of finding a “voice,” or a way of voicing concerns, fears, desires, aspirations, needs and questions as they relate to research. When indigenous peoples become the researchers and not merely the researched, the activity of research is transformed. Questions are framed differently, people participate differently, and problems are defined differently, people participate on different terms” (Smith, 1999: 93)

Involving one’s own experience of being an indigenous person and reflecting the knowledge from indigenous perspective is the part of this thesis. Indigenous knowledge and its role in research is discussed by many researchers, for instance Chilisa (2012), Wilson (2008), Smith Tuhiwai (2006) and others. The main idea of indigenizing research methodologies is to adjust existing methodologies in order to make them tailored to the culture and history of a researched group (Chilisa, 2012). Even more, indigenizing research means to create culturally appropriate concepts, culture-based justifications, and in some cases to involve indigenous “self” by narratives, auto-observation, and personal ethnography (Whitinui, 2013).

Indigenous auto-ethnography is also a method of decolonization of academia, the way to look at and show the reality through the window of “nativeness”. This enables us to achieve a holistic way of understanding a researched topic/group/concept/phenomenon. However, the question of whose reality (objectivity) counts will always be debatable. Whitiniu discusses this:

“Understanding and explaining the nature of our own “cultural encounter,” and as a form of “cultural and critical consciousness,” is to actively free ourselves from the more dominant forms of objectivity” (Whitiniu, 2013:5)

I use the method of auto-ethnography to build a research where the story of rediscovered indigenous identity will be told and shown from the perspective of an indigenous person/group of people. According to Laurel Richardson (2003), in the process of “self”-discovery one is supposed to “1) write as a way of learning more about yourself and your topic with an emphasis on “showing” more than “telling” and 2) as a method of discovery and analysis, in that, by writing in different ways we discover new aspects of our topic and more importantly our relationship to it, each are mutually inclusive, not mutually exclusive” (cited in Whitiniu, 2013). Reflections regarding indigenous ethnic identity discussed by an indigenous person during his/her transformative learning about “self which rediscovers its indigeneity” within Master’s thesis is a method of indigenizing methodology.

However, telling a story is always a risk to be misunderstood. Moreover, one person’s story might not be enough to represent a topic or a phenomenon. Therefore, first, interviews and texts are also among the main sources of my data; second, it is my responsibility to show my story and stories of other people with regard for context. “Content cannot be considered without regard for context, as context provides the ecology wherein people exercise their individuality within a set of social relations and responsibilities” (Macfarlane, Blampied, and Macfarlane, 2011).

Text. Texts used in this thesis consist of books, statistics, and legal documents. Law documents, such as Federal laws, the Constitutions of the Russian Federation and its subunits, and other norms and regulations were used to build a discussion concerning indigenous peoples’ linguistic rights in Russia. However, this thesis is devoted to exploring the links between identity and language revival, and is not a legal discussion on ethnic identity articulation or language use. Statistics gathered from the Federal State Statistic Service helped estimate the number of speakers, language shift, and to analyze the population and its ethnic component.

Web research. I found web research a very useful method of gathering data. Several cases I describe in analytical chapters were found on the Internet - online magazines, newspaper websites and indigenous portals. Media and the Internet play a big role in indigenous peoples' movements and global connection. For indigenous people living in different countries, as well as large countries like Russia, it is extremely important to keep in touch to share common experiences and foster collaboration. For instance, if I ask my new Evenki friends for help or when I have questions they can easily send me the links to articles and books on the Internet. I found it difficult to find sources regarding indigenous issues on Russian websites, because some cases are not paid enough attention by the media or somehow the published articles were removed from websites. Instead, I used English-language Internet to find sources about some Russian cases.

1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

There are several theories which helped me to understand the links between identity and language use. I did not use a particular theory to explain the roots of indigenous identity formation and its links with the language revitalization perspectives. Instead, I tried to combine several theories and discussions to create a balanced theoretical framework.

Defining ethnic identity is crucial for this thesis. In order to answer what ethnic identity is, principal approaches to understanding ethnicity should be provided. First, the primordialist approach defines ethnicity as a collective identity, deeply rooted in historical experience (Esman, 1994:10) or biological traits (Persons, 1999). In the other words, primordialists argue that people's ethnicity is given to them since they were born, from their ancestors. The idea of primordialism is illustrated by McKay: "*man is seen as a leopard who cannot change his ethnic spots*" (1982: 398).

In multicultural and multiethnic societies, people of different ethnic groups live together, interchanging culture, traditions, way of thinking, etc. Ethnic boundaries are therefore not static, they are able to move, and people's ethnicity can also be affected by these changes. The primordialist approach has therefore been criticized by supporters of the instrumentalist approach which focuses on the ability of ethnicity to change. According to the instrumentalist approach, ethnicity is somewhat fluid, highly dynamic and able to adjust to different circumstances, such as political and economic (Scupin, 2003). Therefore, the instrumentalist approach is also known as a "circumstantialist" approach. However, the

instrumentalist approach is criticized for “its view that ethnicity is something that can be decided upon by individuals somewhat at will and for the notion that it is a social construction that is embedded within and controlled by the largest society” (Persons, 1999:140). In the context of indigenous peoples’ position in the mainstream societies and official assimilation policies they experienced in the last century, the instrumentalist approach might be a more or less appropriate theoretical framework.

The third approach serves as a bridge between two previous ways of understanding ethnicity. According to Esman (1994), the constructivist approach allows room for a variability of ethnic solidarities. Moreover, this school of thoughts views ethnicity as one of several identities, “constructed from a massive collection of social interactions, a social phenomenon” (Persons, 1999: 141). I think the idea of constructivism is the most applicable for the modern world where multiethnic societies allow for different identities to interact with less regard to “given” ethnicities.

However, none of the three approaches is exclusive towards others. Summarizing the aforesaid, one can conclude thus: “no matter what my origin is, no matter what my ‘given’ features are, it is my own right to choose the group in which I would participate” (Bacik, 2002:27). The Evenkiness will be discussed in relation to the language shift, Soviet assimilation policies, and ethnic identity revitalization, whose fruit is the new Evenkiness.

There is no universal “indigenous” theory. The history of indigenous peoples is both common for all and unique for each of ethnic group. Each indigenous group has its own history and peculiarities of the development as a distinct ethnos. However, most indigenous people have experienced colonization and assimilation processes; most currently try to decolonize history, academy, and their own identities (Mihehuah, 2003; Smith, 2006). It allows a pan-indigenous identity to emerge and thrive, empowered in the modern interconnected world where indigenous people support each other, and share experience and knowledge. Thus, assuming that indigenous people have common histories and experiences, I use theories in this thesis which have no direct connection to the Evenki people.

It is hard to find theories concerning indigenous peoples’ identity in Russian academic sources, which is why I rely on discussions of the Norwegian anthropologists Kjell Olsen and Harald Eidheim. These discussions represent the changes of ethnic boundaries through a case study of Sami people living on the coast line and the fjord areas in Finnmark, Northern Norway, post-World War II period and today (Eidheim, 1969; Olsen, 2007). My choice of the theoretical background is based on the assumption that Sami and Evenki, as well as other indigenous people, share similar experiences of assimilation policies and marginalization.

Residential schools, the imposed identity of a *superior* mainstream society and changes in the traditional way of life were the main tools of nation-states' policies that both Sami and Evenki have gone through. Thus, I find it appropriate to apply the aforementioned theoretical discussions by Eidheim and Olsen to the Evenki case study in Russia.

In the article "When ethnic identity is a social stigma" (1969), Eidheim introduces three spheres of the identity articulations of the Sami people in Northern Norway:

"(1) a public sphere, (2) a Lappish closed sphere and (3) a Norwegian closed sphere. Each of these is associated with characteristic codes, themes, and valuations, and further distinguished by the ethnic composition of the acting personnel." (Eidheim, 1969: 287)

Eidheim describes the spheres of inter-ethnic relations from the angles of language and symbols which serve as identifying signs. The Lappish (Sami) identity was stigmatized and seen as inferior, while Norwegian was perceived as the "standard identity" which everyone must relate themselves to. The same situation occurred in Russia during the Soviet period and everyone was regarded a Soviet citizen. Eidheim (1969) highlights Saminess being kept in a closed circle of family, relatives, friends, whereas in public, Saminess was hidden, even though locals knew who were Sami. Olsen's theoretical discussion presented in "When ethnic identity is a private matter" (2007) conveys a changed context of the attitude towards Saminess in the same area, discussed by Eidheim earlier. According to Olsen, there are (1) public sphere where the Saminess is expressed in different ways, (2) "public Sami sphere where the collective Sami self-understanding has a hegemony", (3) the private spheres where identities are negotiated (2007: 84). Olsen points out that it was Sami ethno-political movement which united Sami from all over Norway in the time that passed since Eidheim's article was published. The Alta conflict which took place in the 1970-1980s in Norway "has changed the way of thinking about Sami culture" (Olsen, 2007: 83). The main changes Olsen discusses are in public spheres for the articulation of ethnic differences and the attitude towards Saminess in society.

Another concept that also helped me to understand the reasons for indigenous identity development is *globalization*. According to Smith and Ward, ethnicity is a phenomenon which "is found only in multiethnic societies where different communities with different cultures have to interact because they belong to a single society" (2000: 5).

Globalization is mostly seen as an accelerator of the process of colonization, dissolving cultural and ethnic boundaries. For indigenous people who are not part of majority groups, globalization might be a danger. For indigenous people globalization literally means a

possibility of intensification of the ongoing colonization by globalization. However, for some indigenous people globalization means an opening door to an international arena of indigenous discussions, exchange and mutual support which earlier did not exist or was limited. Recently, globalization has become a tool of empowerment for indigenous people. In this thesis I focus on the beneficial for indigenous people side of globalization.

Presently the world is experiencing the time when the Internet is the main source of knowledge, and there is no borders or limits in communication. More arenas of interconnection are emerging for indigenous people to take part in; more indigenous people are involved in international conferences, indigenous working groups, forums etc. We can say that globalization now plays a controversial and in this point - a positive role for indigenous people. Basically, the globalization process is now used “to reinforce ethnic identity as a specific entity, while also being used to explore a broader sense of pan-identity” (Smith and Ward, 2000: 6). Indigenous people in Russia have recently gained the possibility to be part of a global indigenous society and contribute to the global indigenous movement due to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Active collaboration with other indigenous peoples allowed indigenous groups in Russia to be connected to the global arena, where they share experiences and recognize the pan-indigenous identity.

In the fourth chapter devoted to the Evenki language revitalization I use theories of language ecology, rational choices of individuals, and concept of imagined communities. The theory of the language ecology is developed by Einar Haugen (1971), an American linguist and author of the fundamental work “The ecology of language”. Haugen stresses the role of the environment in which language “lives” its own life, whereas the human environment is a society. On one hand, Haugen’s paradigm might fit the scope of this thesis because it based on the discussion about multilingual societies and Evenki people live in a multinational and multilingual society. On the other hand, the concept of language ecology encompasses a situation in which language is used in a traditional environment, which for most indigenous people is tied to a traditional way of life.

Continuing to design a theoretical framework I refer to the theory of rational choices postulated by Michael Banton (1980) and developed by John Edwards (1985) to a “comparable argument on the detachability of language from identity <...> economic rationality often plays a part in the language choices individuals make, particularly when individuals realize the ‘benefits’ of shifting to a more ‘modern’ language” (cited in May, 2005). According to Edwards, individuals make their choices regarding language use based on benefits and costs it might involve. In a multilingual and multinational society, language

choice is one of the dilemmas some individuals struggle over their entire lives. In the Russian Federation where indigenous languages have little or no practical context indigenous individuals are left with little choice. Either they learn and/or teach children mother tongue at home prioritizing it to two or more languages (Russian, local e.g. Yakut, English etc.), or they let the mother tongue be forgotten since it has almost no environment to be used.

Benedict Anderson's views on identity and language detachability will also be used to balance the theoretical discussion. In his work "Imagined communities", Anderson (1991) develops his views on language as not an emblem of nation-ness, such as flag or costumes, but rather a tool to generate an imagined society, while building particular solidarities. This point of view is relevant for minorities' situation, especially for indigenous peoples whose community might not be based on everyday face-to-face interaction. Moreover, the "reuniting" and recreating language environments as a function of the mother tongue for indigenous people might currently be one of the most important and topical ones. This also corresponds to Haugen's theory of the language ecology and concept of globalization in which imagined or constructed communities function e.g. in social networks or in special arenas.

1.4 REFLECTIONS AND REFLEXIVITY

I am honestly able to say that my thesis developed me, rather than that I have developed my master thesis. I am an indigenous person, I am an Evenki. I have never discussed either indigeneity, or the identity question with my relatives. Everything we lived through was natural; we never needed such a discussion to be brought up. It might be a consequence of the Soviet education - not to talk about personality and ethnic identity. But now I see how important it actually is to be aware of one's own identity and origin.

When I came to Tromsø for the first time in 2011, I was hesitant to identify my ethnicity. I will discuss my personal experience later in this thesis, but I was surprised not to be able to answer such an obvious question of ethnic identity. Born in an Evenki village⁸, raised in a Russian society, and brought up in a mixed society of more than hundred ethnic groups, I was always switching my own identity, adjusting to one or another society. The question of my own origin and indigenous world burnt me from the inside after I learned

⁸ Evenki villages which have a status of compact residential settlement of Evenki people

about other indigenous people, and their history and their current attitude towards their identity. I applied for the Master of indigenous studies in Tromsø, and when I came to study I presented myself as “a progeny of Evenki people from Siberia”. To say “a progeny” and “I am an Evenki” are totally different stories. I used the chance to study the history of my people, discover my own roots and found myself realizing how much time it took me to awaken my activist indigenous identity.

I am aware of the danger of being an indigenous person writing about indigenous identity. It seems from the first glance that I am in an insider’s position. But it would be a huge simplification to put myself in that place. Firstly, at the beginning of the writing process I could not easily identify whether I was an indigenous person or not. Furthermore, I did not have any prejudice about the situation regarding the misrepresentation or continuous stigmatization of indigenous people in Russia. Only when writing my master thesis have I gained an external view of Russian society in which indigenous people exist, being forced to merge with, or be silent within, the majority societies.

The main argument I felt proved I was not indigenous was that I do not speak my mother tongue. Henceforth, I refer to Evenki as the mother tongue for Evenki people, since in the context of this thesis Evenki is the mother tongue of the Evenki people who identify themselves as Evenki. I was sure that I am not enough Evenki because I do not have my native speech, nor do I have a registration as an Evenki⁹. Nevertheless, I also did not feel like an outsider, since my whole family led an indigenous way of life, but was not an insider since I perceived myself as “not indigenous enough”. Halfway through my study in Master in Indigenous Studies I realized the actual meaning of being indigenous, no matter what language one speaks or whether the ethnicity is registered in the passport. One is indigenous if one *feels* indigenous.

Thus I combined and used the advantages of being both an insider and an outsider while writing this thesis. The main challenge was to involve my own experience as little as possible, yet allow the reader to see both my point of view as an indigenous researcher. In order to avoid bias I might have inadvertently put in the text, I have tried to read my written material from the point of view of an outsider. Moreover, I tried to imagine an average person from Russia reading my Master’s thesis. I did so because the subject of indigenous peoples is

⁹ if one wants to be officially counted as Evenki (or representative of other small-numbered indigenous people of Russia) one must have an insert in a passport proving that person belongs to a small-numbered indigenous ethnic group

not studied at Russian schools - and the cases when indigenous people fight for their rights are not given any attention in the media.

I would like my Master's thesis to be a short introduction for Russian people who are still not fully aware of indigenous peoples living in the multiethnic society of Russia. Also, I hope this Master's thesis will be helpful for Russian people of indigenous origins who are still in the process of finding the way to their own identity, as I was some time ago. Therefore, I have tried to structure my thesis and write it in a way that people with any background would not be challenged to understand its topic and discussions. On one hand, I have benefited from being an insider in looking at the situation concerning Evenki identity development while using my own thoughts, experience and intuition. On the other hand, I might have been biased when discussing the case study. However, I have taken every chance to reflect on it with my supervisor (who has no background in indigenous studies), classmates and professors. I have gotten fabulous help from all of them in making my work as objective as possible.

1.5 ETHICS AND MY ROLE IN RESEARCH

Every research activity is an exercise in ethics (Chilisa, 2012). Ethics is a framework which shapes the way of doing research, methods to be chosen and the way informants are asked questions.

First, as has been stated already, to ensure a voluntary participation and the right to withdraw for informants I obtained their informed consent (Silvermann, 2013). For those whom I interviewed via Skype I sent a consent form signed by me electronically and they sent it back to me before the interview. At the very beginning of our conversation and even earlier, when asking for an interview, I made sure that potential informants acquired all information concerning my topic, questions, objectives and methods of my research. Likewise, the institution – the University of Tromsø – was presented. Notably, most informants preferred to be anonymized, so I made every possible effort to protect their personal data. I do understand possible risks for the participants and therefore the issue of confidentiality is not questioned. I tried to make my research as harm-free as possible for my informants by anonymizing and naming them Informant A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I and J (Silvermann, 2013). To fulfill the right of informants to participate in the research process and to reflect upon the data interpretation, I have sent a draft of my thesis to all of them. All their comments have

been taken into consideration and have affected the revision, so my informants and I have achieved reciprocity and collaboration.

As an insider in the research area I was not challenged very much to obtain trust from my informants. Instead, they encouraged and supported me in my initiative to write a Master's thesis about the Evenki identity. I keep in touch with all my informants and I hope we have built respectful relationships where we help each other independent of my research. I am grateful for what I have learned from them and how they supported and welcomed me into their communities. It makes me feel even more responsible to represent them respectfully. To my own surprise, my informants opened a door for me which I thought had been closed forever. I think it is meant to be that I came to this point to write a Master's thesis and ask questions I have never dared to ask, and my informants answered me. Based on what has been said, I think the 4R rule of mutual respect, reciprocity, responsibility, and respectful representation found in works of indigenous researchers Wilson (2008) and Chilisa (2012) has been fulfilled.

As for my own role in the research process, I will refer to the emic and etic models of researcher positioning developed by Barnard (2002). According to Barnard, there are two contrasting methods of analyzing data in anthropological research - emic (from phonemic) and etic (from phonetic). Basically, the emic model presupposes a culture-specific analysis with holistically understood nuances and social structure relations as the main method, whereas the etic model implies an outsider's view on the studied culture or specific phenomenon. On one hand, before writing my thesis I was certain about my insider's role, which is the emic model, but after studying the subject and analyzing the cases using different theories, I realized that I actually possessed the outsider's view, which was imposed on me by my upbringing back home. As Barnard has said, "*people understand actions or words only through the culture they possess*" (2002: 182).

1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW

The topics of indigenous ethnic identity revitalization and revival of endangered languages have been attracting recent attention of linguists, ethnographers and anthropologists. The ethnic identity of the Evenki and its development in the USSR and Russia has been discussed by many researchers. The ones I briefly mention below are just a small part of the work done. Please note, however, that most of the literature on the Evenki

history and language is reviewed thematically in the relevant chapters of my thesis, as the argument unfolds.

Alexia Bloch (2006), an anthropologist from the University of British Columbia, wrote about Evenki identity formation under the Soviet period, focusing on residential schools. She argues that residential schools, being an instrument of influence over indigenous children, changed peoples' identities. The "social life of the state", through the case study of the Evenki in Podkamennaya Tunguska, was explored by the anthropologist Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov (2003). He argues that in Russia, the concepts of "the state" and "the indigenous" can solely be defined in their interrelation.

David G. Anderson's work (1998, 2000) provides us with discussions of the ethnic identity of Evenki people in a multiethnic society of the Taimyr Peninsula in Siberia. He introduces the idea of "*nationality inflation*" and shows the role of the Soviet State in the development of ethnic identities. Piers Vitebsky (2006) discusses the ethnic identity of Even people development and formation through field notes. The Even people, previously known as Tungus, as well as Evenki, are reindeer herders. Vitebsky shows the indigenous identity articulation from different angles through different stories.

Many researchers have investigated the question of the Evenki language revitalization, particularly in an interconnection with the Evenki ethnic identity. Grenoble and Whaley (1998, 2006) wrote about Evenki language situation in the USSR and Russia. Bulatova and Grenoble (1999) have also contributed to this issue with their work "Evenki". Nadezhda Mamontova (2013) discussed the language shift and choices of languages in a multi-ethnic society in Evenkiya. Her works are among those which represent the modern Evenki situation and the dichotomy of "urban" and "traditional" Evenki ethnic identity, as well as their links with the Evenki language.

The Evenki case in Russia cannot be explained and discussed without a consideration of the history of the area where particular Evenki groups live. Alas, the case of the Evenki in Yakutia has been under-researched, and there is still a great deal of work to be done there. Although Evenki in all regions share the same experience of assimilation processes and language loss, the main difference is their intercultural relationships with neighboring ethnic groups. Furthermore, the present situation concerning the Evenki language varies from region to region of the Russian Federation.

1.7 THESIS OUTLINE

This thesis consists of five chapters. The first is an introduction to the topic, including theoretical frameworks, methods, data, reflections and ethics. The second chapter is devoted to the history of Evenki people from ancient time until the post-Soviet period where the themes of the Evenki language and assimilation experience are touched upon. The third and fourth chapters are dedicated to the analysis of the topic, based on findings from the fieldwork, which illustrate the development of the Evenkiness and the Evenki language situation from historical and social perspectives. The fifth chapter is a conclusive discussion and suggestions for the topic, based on the results of my study as presented in the third and fourth chapters.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORY OF EVENKI PEOPLE AND EVENKI LANGUAGE IN RUSSIA

2.0 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I discuss the common history of the Evenki people in Russia beginning from the 16th century and in some cases refer to the ethnogenesis of Evenki since time immemorial. The history of the indigenous peoples of the Far North of Russia can be divided into four macro-periods: the Tsarist time from the 16th century to 1917, the Soviet time until World War II, the Soviet time after World War II and the post-Soviet period. In this chapter I focus on the period from the 16th century until post-Soviet times. I also tell the story of my family and their experience of being Soviet citizens in a big, multinational state, while still deeply indigenous at heart.

The hypothesis advanced in this chapter is that the Soviet policy toward indigenous people by means of forced education in a foreign (Russian) language brought dramatic consequences for the native language use and, subsequently, an identity crisis among indigenous population. I agree that education played a positive role for indigenous people, enabling them to protect their own rights and preserve their mother tongue. But this same education also violated the human right to decide one's own future, deprived them of traditional ways of life, and interfered with the transfer of traditional knowledge and skills subsequent generations. These policies make the Soviet politics toward indigenous people highly controversial and debatable.

2.1 MY FAMILY STORY AND HOW I CAME TO KNOW THAT I AM EVENKI

I was born in Kutana village in the Aldan region of Sakha Republic (Yakutia), Russia. My mother is Evenki. I was raised according to the Evenki traditions and beliefs. I was taught to respect mother nature and life according to Evenki habits. I was told that my nation is strong but has been suppressed by the Soviet regime and policy.

I remember my great-grandmother. Her name was Praskovia, she was born in 1932 and married an Evenki man - Nikolay Trofimov, Nukuchan was his Evenki name. They had nine children, only two of whom are now alive. The two first children were born in a tent in the taiga while their parents were moving with their reindeer. My grandmother, Tatiana Trofimova, the daughter of Nikolay, told me some stories about my family and that is how I know who I am. Many people told me that I had very talented and great ancestors.

Nimngakan heroic epos as orally transferred cultural heritage of Evenki

The heroic epos of Evenki is called Nimngakan. Nukuchan was one of the greatest and the last singers of Nimngakan among the Evenki¹⁰. Anna Myreeva, a researcher of Evenki folklore from Yakutia, has dedicated her life to Evenki culture and her main works are based on Nukuchan's tale songs. She describes her experience of working with my great-grandfather:

“I was very lucky to meet a wonderful storyteller. I have worked with him for ten years. The first time I went to Kutana we worked for a month. He dictated me the epos, but sometimes it was difficult for him to dictate what should be sung... He closed his eyes and dictated the story... We could not write the whole epos down during one month. Nukuchan promised me to finish the rest: “I can write, I learned how to read and write in *likbez* (liquidation of illiteracy), I will try to write down the rest of the epos”... Winter and summer passed and in the autumn I received two big notebooks with the rest of the *Irkismondya-soning* tale. He was quite literate though he mixed Cyrillic and Latin scripts. Three more epic tales were written in this way by Nikolay Germogenovich: “*Dulin Buga Torgandulin*” – “*Tongandun of the Middle World*”. It contains 300 pages excluding translation into Russian and it is the biggest Evenki epos tale... He was writing the last tale when he was hit by the most acute attack of liver disease in the taiga. He needed emergency surgery. After

¹⁰ “Trofimov brothers - storytellers from Buta clan” by Anna Myreeva, my translation URL: <http://fond-tatiana.ru/trofimov>

anesthesia, he never regained consciousness and died on the operating table. The last part of the written work I received after his death. In memory of the talented, selfless narrator Trofimov I have placed two tales in the 1st volume of the Evenki folklore 60-volume series "Monuments of the Folklore of Siberia and the Far East". And I am proud that the son of the Evenki people Nikolai Trofimov has paved a wide road for storytellers of Siberia and the Far East. His *nimngakans* (epic tales) in a book with a vinyl record called "Evenki heroic tales" was released in 1990, the first of all 60 volumes of the series, which has a global significance¹¹".

This year, 2015, is my great-grandfather's 100th anniversary. There have already been held many events in his memory. Many more are planned to be held in the summer and fall. I hope my Master's thesis will be my little contribution to the memory of the great Evenki son who perpetuated Evenki epos.

What does it mean to be Evenki?

I have always tried to understand who I am; I was raised in an Evenki family, moved to a Russian town and then, finally, moved to Yakutsk, where more than hundred ethnic groups live together. When I was traveling back to my community, to Kutana in the Aldan region of the Republic of Sakha, I always asked my great-grandmother about their past. She told me many unbelievable stories about how they lived in taiga, hunting and raising children in the forest. In my family we got used to not revealing our Evenki identity, though it was not a matter of shame but rather a matter of privacy. It probably, came from the Soviets' policy of "one nation of Soviet citizens" where people with no ethnic but common Soviet identity lived together, but maybe it was caused by nationalism where it was easier for indigenous people to merge among others majority groups.

My grandmother told me one story she remembered from childhood when her family became sedentary in the 1950s. They came to the village and many times she heard from other people (Yakut) "tungus, tungus". That time it was mainly used to offend people using the word "tungus". Later I learned that tungus was the name of Evenki people (but has not been the autonym of Evenki), adopted by Russian researchers in the early 16th century from Yakut. Tungus was official name of Evenki people in literature until 1932 (Vasilevich, 1968). According to one of the theories of the etymology of this name, "tungus" (toŋus) in Yakut

¹¹ «Trofimov brothers - storytellers from Buta clan» by Anna Myreeva, my translation URL: <http://fond-tatiana.ru/trofimov>

language and other Turkic languages literally means “pig”. Another theory, according to Shirokogoroff (1887-1939, a Russian anthropologist who worked and lived in China and dedicated his life to research about Manchu and Tungus people) is that there were tribes in Manchuria called Tung-hu which means “Eastern Barbarians” (Shirokogoroff, 1979). Evenki themselves never liked to be called “tungus”, asserting the right name of own ethnic group as «Evenk, Evenki» (Uvarova, 2005; Vitebsky, 2006).

I was also told stories about how hard it was to become sedentary and leave the traditional way of life. Children had to go to residential schools, far away from their parents. Grandma told me that nature is our home, we will always be the children of the taiga. She always had stories about their life in the taiga, and remembered it as the best time ever. When we went to the taiga she taught me how not to get lost and how to see the signs of the forest. I learned a lot from being with my family in the taiga.

Hidden identity

I did not realize that I had always heard Evenki language or at least Evenki words in the Yakut language until I started speaking Russian as my first language. And how surprised I was at the age of ten when I found out that my great-grandma tried to ease the rumble of thunder by repeating very interesting saying in Evenki. (Archi-archi, goroli-goroli what in Evenki means Thunder, thunder, go faraway, go faraway). Now, when I learn the Evenki language I realize how many expressions in Evenki we used to use in our everyday life.

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. That is why I am now writing my Master’s thesis. I want to examine Evenkiness and its role in Evenki language revitalization.

2.2 EVENKI PEOPLE AND EVENKI LANGUAGE IN RUSSIA AND OTHER COUNTRIES

The administrative organization of the Russian Federation

First of all, let me give a brief introduction to the Russian Federation's administrative organization in order to explain how indigenous peoples' rights for preservation of native languages and internal self-determination are secured (or limited). The Russian Federation is based on a mixed ethnic and territorial federalism and has a very specific history of its development. Nowadays the Russian Federation has 85 subjects: 22 republics, 9 territories, 46 oblasts (regions), 3 federal cities, 1 autonomous region and 4 autonomous okrugs (areas)¹². It is noteworthy that there are three levels of political system in Russia - federal (central), regional (represented by oblasts, okrugs, republics) and local (represented by municipalities).

Republics and autonomous okrugs have more independence than other regions. First of all, they have their own constitutions and legislation which is based on the Constitution of the Russian Federation but aimed to preserve culture of ethnic minorities. The names of respective Parliaments are also more "ethnic", such as Legislative Suglan in the former Evenki Autonomous Okrug (which is now part of the Krasnoyarskii Krai) or Il Tumen in Sakha Republic¹³. Secondly, they have their own citizenship, authorities and - most importantly - territory. Thus, the Constitution of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) states that the territory of the Republic belongs to its multinational people and is the ancestral land of a traditional settlement of its indigenous peoples (the aboriginal population including Yakut people)¹⁴. Moreover, the language of the peoples living in republic and autonomous okrugs, as the main aspect of their ethnic identity, can be claimed as a second (after Russian) official language within a republic or autonomous okrug. The languages of indigenous peoples in Yakutia are recognized as official languages in the territories of a compact settlement of the indigenous peoples¹⁵. Thirdly, republics have property rights over resources, forests, minerals and water¹⁶.

¹² The Constitution of the Russian Federation Chapter 3, Article 65 on 12.12.93 URL: <http://www.constitution.ru/en/10003000-04.htm>

¹³ The constitution of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) Article 58 URL: <http://www.sakha.gov.ru/node/17668>

¹⁴ The Constitution of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) Article 44: URL: <http://sakha.gov.ru/node/17668>

¹⁵ The Constitution of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) Article 46: URL: <http://sakha.gov.ru/node/17668>

¹⁶ The Constitution of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) Article 5: URL: <http://sakha.gov.ru/node/17668>

Indigenous peoples of the Republic of Sakha, Evenki population

There are five indigenous ethnic groups in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). These are Evenki, Even, Dolgan, Yukaghir, and Chukchi. The Evenki and Even languages belong to the same Tungus group. Before 1931 both Evenki and Even people were known in literature as Tungus (Shirokogoroff, 1979). The Dolgan and Yukaghir both have a very small population comprising around 1,000 people each in Russia. The Chukchi in Russia number approximately 16,000 people and are particularly concentrated in Yakutia with 700 people¹⁷.

Evenki people are a nomadic indigenous people living in Siberia (Russia), Mongolia and China. Historically, Evenki have been hunters and reindeer herders. Such activities determined a nomadic way of life with constant motion and full participation of all family members in livelihood. Evenki lived in small groups of families moving around herding pastures, where rare contacts with other ethnic groups occurred (Brian, 2003). Evenki social organization has been based on kinship and clan division (Bloch, 2004).

Evenki currently comprise a population of around 70,000 people in three nation-states, including Russia, Mongolia, and China. In Russia, the Evenki live in 10 regions (subjects of the Russian Federation) with a total population of 37,842 people (according to the 2010 national census)¹⁸. In the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), there are 21,008 Evenki registered¹⁹. According to Ethnologue, 30,500 Evenki live in China and around 1,000 Evenki are settled in Mongolia²⁰. It is stated in *Ethnologue: the Languages of the World* that, of all 70,000 Evenki, approximately 17,000 speak the Evenki language. In Russia, 4,310 Evenki of the total 37,843 speak their mother tongue (according to the 2010 national census of the Russian Federation)²¹.

¹⁷ National Census of the Russian Federation in 2010 URL: http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/Documents/Vol4/pub-04-04.pdf National Census of the Russian Federation in 2010

¹⁸ The National census of the Russian Federation 2010 URL: http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/Documents/Vol4/pub-04-01.pdf

¹⁹ The National Census of the Russian Federation 2010 URL: http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/Documents/Vol4/pub-04-04.pdf

²⁰ Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Evenki language URL: <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/evn>

²¹ The National census of the Russian Federation 2010 URL: http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/Documents/Vol4/pub-04-20.pdf

Evenki language

The Evenki language belongs to the Tungus (aka Tungus-Manchurian) group of the Altaic language family. On map 2 you can see the location of indigenous languages in Eurasia. It is visible that the Tungus-Manchurian group of languages, comprised of Evenki and Even languages, is the most widespread among them. Both the Even and the Evenki languages occupied a vast territory throughout Siberia, Mongolia and parts of China. Thus, as the famous researcher J.G. Rychkov notes, when Russian Cossack conquerors went further into the depths of Siberia they met Tungus everywhere up the coast of the Pacific Ocean in the East and to the coast of the Arctic Ocean in the North, as well as to the borders with China and Mongolia in the South (Rychkov, 1994) .

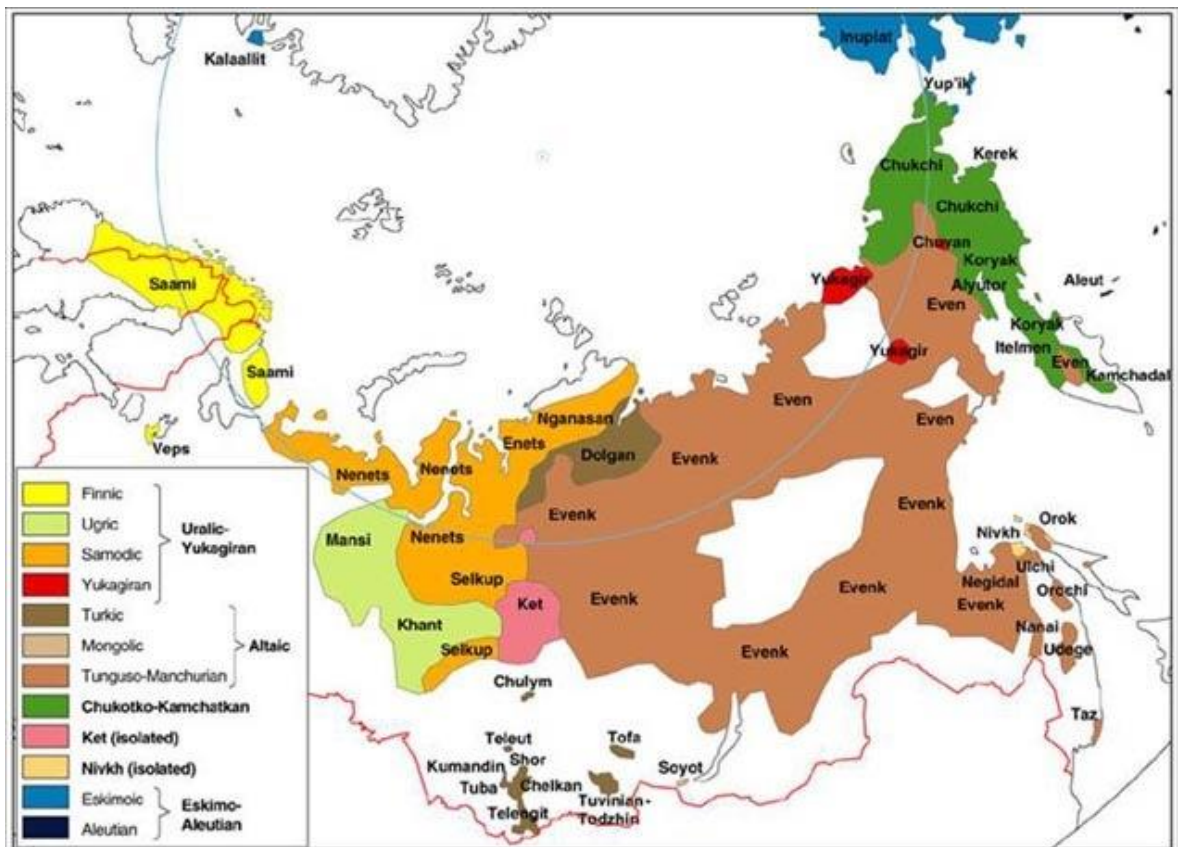


Figure 2. Indigenous languages in Eurasia with division by ethnic groups

The dispersed population of Evenki and the diversity of their dialects played both positive and negative roles. On one hand, some Evenki could preserve traditions and language as they lived far away from newcomers. On the other hand, it was difficult for Evenki to resist assimilation and make education beneficial. For instance, teaching children their mother

tongue in remote settlements has been hampered by the lack of human resources (Farfan and Ramallo, 2010).

More than 130 distinct ethnic groups live in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). The major groups are Russians (37% of the total population) and Yakuts aka Sakha (48% of the total population). Evenki is the largest indigenous group which amounts to 0.04% of the total population of the Republic of Sakha. Due to continuous contact with other ethnic groups, Evenki in Yakutia have adopted a lot of vocabulary from Yakut and Russian languages (Nuttal, 2004; Wurm, 1996; Grenoble and Whaley, 1999). Ethel Dunn (1968) analyzes the processes of language use and multilingualism among the indigenous peoples in the Far North of the USSR. According to Dunn, Evenki who had close contact with Yakut people consider Yakut as their native language, while Evenki who lived close to Russians refer to Russian their first language.

The assimilation process and multilingualism have led to rapid loss of the Evenki language (Gilbers, 2000; Grenoble and Whaley, 2006; Bulatova and Grenoble, 1999). This language shift has been documented by Nadezhda Bulatova – an Evenki researcher at the Russian Academy of Sciences, who has translated the Bible into Evenki language and specializes in the Evenki dialectology. According to Bulatova (1999), 29.5% of Evenki in 1989 claimed Evenki as their first language, while in 2002 there was only around 21% and in 2010 only 12% of Evenki in Russia considered Evenki their mother tongue. A steady decrease owing to bi- and multilingualism and assimilation, as well as the lack of education in the mother tongue, were the main reasons for the Evenki language loss.

Ancient Evenki and Evenki in other countries

Glafira Vasilevich (1895-1971), one of the most respected researchers of Tungus people and languages explains the ethnogenesis of the Evenki people by toponyms and intercorrelations of neighboring languages.

According to Vasilevich, ancient Tungus people came to Lake Baikal²² and Yenisey River²³ as an independent ethnic group with their own dialect in the first century AD.

²² Situated in Southeast Siberia, the 3.15-million-ha Lake Baikal is the oldest (25 million years) and deepest (1,700 m) lake in the world – URL <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/754>

²³ Yenisey River, River,co.org/en/list/75Enisei, Evenk Ioanesi (anesi ((esi ((nesi (n/list/754/enRussia, one of the longest rivers in Asia. The world" <http://global.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/3847Yenisey-runs-from-south-to-north-across-the-great-expanse-of-central-Siberia> - URL <http://global.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/652974/Yenisey-River>

Geographically, these groups are the ancestors of the Evenki who now live in Buryatia and Krasnoyarsk Krai. It can be assumed that other Evenki with different dialects have formed their own groups which now live in Yakutia. Vasilevich builds her discussion about the timing of the arrival of Evenki on several facts.

First, the interaction and interchangeable vocabulary between Evenki and Samoyeds at the very beginning of the first century let ethnographers assume that Evenki had already been living in the basin of the Yenisey River at the time Samoyeds began to move there. Secondly, the ancient names of the rivers, mountains, and areas as a whole depict Evenki origins. Thus, Yenisey River was named by Evenki based on the ancient Evenki word “jene” which means “a river, a big river” (Vasilevich, 1949). Other rivers in the vast area of Western Siberia have Evenki names, such as the Ural Mountains have Tungus origin (the Evenki word “ure” or “urel” means “a mountain”)²⁴. These toponyms with Evenki origin point to the fact that long before Samoyeds and other groups came to the Yenisey area, Tungus already lived there (in the first century of AD).

As for Eastern Siberia, Vasilevich assumes a constant contact of the Eastern Tungus with turkic speaking tribes, such as the Yakut. Also, she touches upon common vocabulary concerning marriage, which is a sign of intermarriage since ancient times (Vasilevich, 1949). In the Nimngakan, epos of the Evenki, there are many words which are also found in the Yakut language. Thus, “Uraankai”²⁵, currently a popular word in Yakut society is used by young Sakha to express their relation to the great nation of ancient “Uraankhaidar”. In the Nimnkagan about Sodani and Develchene heroes “Urankai” is mentioned several times, also other words currently are used in Yakut language are in Evenki epos (Myreeva and Trofimov, 1990). According to Vasilevich, Tungus had to move to the North and Southwest in present Yakutia in the first millennia AD because the ancestors of Sakha came to central Yakutia (Vasilevich 1968). According to several sources, Yakut people had come to Lena basin (present Yakutia) in the tenth century AD (Gogolev, 1993). Thus, ancient Tungus lived in the territory of Yakutia long ago before Yakut came there.

As was mentioned earlier, Evenki live also in Mongolia and China. Around a thousand Evenki are registered in Mongolia and more than 30,000 in China²⁶. Unfortunately, there seems to be very little information available about the Evenki in Mongolia, but according to

²⁴ The dictionary of toponymes in Russia <http://toposural.ru/y.html>

²⁵ Uraankhai in Mongolian “means radiant, luminous” http://rtyva.ru/press_center/news/science/11377/

²⁶ Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Evenki language <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/evn>

Ethnologue: Languages of the World, the status of the Evenki language in Mongolia is nearly extinct.

Northern China is home to around 30,000 Evenki, which are divided into Evenki - Soluns (Evenki herders, the largest group), Yakut-Evenki, who came from the basin of the Lena River, Tungus - Evenki and Orochon. Hunting is strictly forbidden in China, so hunting skills for which Evenki are famous have been lost. The Government of China supports and enables *khoshuns* (Evenki communities) to earn paid manufacturing in complex projects promoting tourism. The offset of these jobs is the loss of many traditional skills: tailoring, manufacturing of household items such as sleds or *maut* (lasso) that proved unnecessary after the ban on hunting.

Chinese Evenki preserved the language, their dialect is similar to the language of our relatives in Baikit. The Association of the Evenki in Yakutia and Evenki from Buryatia visit *khoshun* in China. After several visits cultural collaborations have been established with the Chinese Evenki. Evenki language is vital in China, although its status is shifting. However, there is no written language, so it is transmitted only through oral tradition. The language is not taught at schools, even as an optional subject. All Evenki acknowledge and agree that there should be a common written language, a supra- regional dialectical language with similar standards for all Evenki.

2.3 SIBERIA AND THE SMALL PEOPLES OF THE NORTH: THE TSARIST PERIOD (1600s-1920s)

Hundreds of years ago, the number of Evenki at the time of their entry into Russia (XVII century) was estimated at about 36,135 people. The most accurate data on the Evenki population was given after the census in 1897: 64,500 people, 34,471 of whom (53%) stated the first language as Evenki and the rest who reported their first language as Russian (31.8%), Yakut, Buryat and other languages as their first languages²⁷.

The very first contact of Evenki with Russians is documented in the early sixteenth century, when ethnographers went to study the geography and people of Siberia at the same time as Russians came to conquer Siberia in order to tax aborigines (Vasilevich, 1968). In Tsarist times, Evenki, as well as other peoples in the North in Russia, fell under the Tsarist

²⁷ The peoples of the Red Book, Evenki <http://www.eki.ee/books/redbook/evens.shtml>

iasak (fur-tribute) system (Slezkine, 1996). In 1580-1600 Russians built forts called “*ostrogs*” near rivers, streams, and settlements to collect fur tax from the native population of Siberia. For example, one of the first ostrogs was built in 1638 in an area of today’s Yakutsk, the Republic of Sakha. Historically, the “Evenki social organization has never been strictly regimented”, but with the coming of Russian conquerors in the sixteenth century, the clan division and role of the male grew. Apparently, males had to negotiate with traders more frequently than women; however, women; sometimes did negotiate too (Freeman, 2000: 62).

According to Vasilevich, the colonization of Siberia which began in the 1600s had destroyed the traditional way of life for some of the Evenki by the end of 18th century (Vasilevich 1968). The burden of the “triple oppression” (*troinoi gnyot*), where Evenki had to pay local administration, “industrial strangers” and traders, was so heavy that families could not manage any longer. Some people had to sell their reindeer because of famine, destroyed pastures, and burnt forests with decreasing animal populations. With the establishment of the USSR, the triple oppression of aboriginal people in the Far North came to an end, but the better situation for indigenous people in the Far North did not last long. Language policy was the beginning of an end for indigenous peoples’ traditional way of life. The benign will to document and preserve languages by education and the state policy of liquidation of the illiteracy was replaced by the policy of forced sedentarization and forced education of indigenous children in residential schools.

2.4. THE SOVIET POLICY TOWARDS INDIGENOUS PEOPLE: ENLIGHTENMENT OR A ROAD TO MISERY?

The main changes in the language use and way of life for Evenki people began in the twentieth century, with the establishment of the Soviet Union. The newly formed state first needed to increase the rate of literacy among its population, and secondly, to compete with the West in education (Joseph et. al. 2003). According to Grenoble, Professor of Linguistics specializing in Slavic and Arctic indigenous languages at the University of Chicago, the history of languages in Siberia is very complex and “came about as part of a mandate from the central government” (Grenoble and Whaley, 2006: 70). In the 1920s, when the period of nation-building began, the Soviet ideology advanced the idea that Soviet people have to acquire the one and only identity of being Soviet citizens.

According to Dennis Bartels, an anthropologist and Associate Professor at the Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada, it was the process of consolidation where the dilemma of self-consciousness of indigenous people had been promoted by a combination of common language (which was Russian), education (delivered in Russian), standard identity of the Soviet citizen and the “blossoming” of distinct national cultures (1995: 6). Grenoble discusses the controversy of the status of Russian language in the creation of Soviet society where the language of revolution and main politics was Russian, but “*no single language should be awarded the status of a state language*” (Joseph et. al. 2003: 111). Obviously, it was not possible either to grant all languages top official status, or to rule without a common language. However, the Declaration of Rights of the People of Russia of November 2nd, 1917 claimed that all people in Bolshevik Russia were equal and had the same right to education in their native language²⁸. The controversial policies of the USSR have led to different consequences for all the indigenous peoples of the North.

Small-numbered peoples of the North

At the beginning of the twentieth century, many of the Siberian languages lacked literary form. In order to make its population literate, the Soviet government decided to introduce an education policy called *likbez* (*likvidacija bezgramotnosti*), or liquidation of illiteracy (Joseph et. al. 2003). Just like all citizens of the newly formed Soviet Union, the so-called small peoples were obliged to learn Russian, too. The notion of “small-numbered people” came to be an officially used term in 1926 when the recently formed government of the Soviet Union adopted “*The Temporary Statutes on the Management of Native Nationalities and Tribes of the Northern Outlying Areas of the RSFSR*”, and passed the official list of 26 indigenous peoples.

“The official designation for these northern peoples came to be malye narody Severa (“Small peoples of the North”); the term small referring to small in number, as enumerated by the Census” (Sillanpää, 2008: 3)

²⁸ Declaration of Rights of the People of Russia (2.11.1917)
<https://www.marxists.org/history/ussr/government/1917/11/02.htm>

Currently small numbered peoples of the Far North and Siberia are listed in the corresponding Federal Law. To qualify, and the number of an indigenous ethnic group should not exceed 50,000²⁹.

Shirokogoroff in his article “*Tungus literary language*” states the essence of the Soviet polity towards the Evenki people, previously known as Tungus:

“In order to form an accurate idea about the history of Literary Tungus, we have to look at this machinery (Soviet policy) as well. Installation of this machinery was not a play of imagination; it was imposed by the actual problem of organizing the native populations of Siberia and northern Russia. Here we have to distinguish between different aspects of the problem that the authorities were obliged to deal with among the Tungus: the aspect of controlling Tungus scattered over an enormous territory; the aspect of their economic activity, to which the authorities could not be indifferent; the aspect of the ideological side; and the aspect of practical measures to be taken” (1991: 42)

Moreover, Shirokogoroff explains why Evenki people were anti-Soviet and were not willing to become part of the newly formed state. In order to save their traditional ways of life, to be free they hid their reindeer and children from state control. They were relatively successful due to nomadism because they could move throughout the huge territory of Siberia. But the Soviets saw both dangers and possible collaboration in Tungus. Tungus (Evenki), on one hand, were good hunters and suppliers of fur goods, which were one of the largest export items. On the other hand, the Soviets felt it impossible to control Evenki. Therefore, the need in a strict and systematic policy toward indigenous people emerged.

The Soviet Union’s government saw a big danger in the Tungus who lived in the Far East due to their active civic position during the formation of the Soviets. The Tungus (Evenki man) Pavel Karamzin and the Yakut man Mikhail Artyemyev became leaders of the biggest rebellion of the indigenous people of Siberia in the history of Russia. In the period of the 1924-1927 the Okhotsk shore and Eastern Yakutia were under the rebellion of Evenki and Yakut against the Soviet regime. The main reason was the separation of Okhotskiy krai from Yakutia and its connection to the Kamchatskiy Oblast. Among other reasons were unmanageable taxes, terror from the new local government, and absence of schools for indigenous people and so on. On the 14th of July 1924, in Ayan, a Pan-Tungus congress took place. At that congress Tungus claimed their independence from Soviets and stated external self-determination with control of their own territories and resources. They addressed the

²⁹ Federal Law «On guarantees of the rights of small-numbered peoples of the Russian Federation»<http://base.garant.ru/181870/> List of small-numbered peoples of the RF http://base.garant.ru/180406/#block_1

League of Nations as “powerful defenders of small indigenous groups worldwide” asking it to rescue them from the “common enemy of the world nationalism - Russian communism”³⁰.

Leaders were aware of their own rights, their claim for self-determination being based on universal human rights and rights of indigenous people. Tungus Republic, as they called their territorial formation, had its own flag and anthem. The main reason for the rebellion was the inequality of the small-numbered peoples’ position in the newly formed state. The end of the story is quite tragic since more than 300 people were repressed and killed; many of whom were not connected to the rebellion itself. The repression continued until WWII. Since that time the Tungus were seen as danger to the Soviet state. Therefore, one can see how the Evenki people were “fragmented” between subunits of the Soviet Union and Russian Federation. For instance, the former Evenki Autonomous Region (Okrug) was established in the territory where the least amount of Evenki lived. But in the Republic of Sakha where the largest population of the Evenki people is presently settled, the municipalities acquired “ethnic-based” Evenki status only some years ago.

Alphabet and Evenki dialects as a matter of identity and belonging

Most Siberian indigenous languages had no written form at the beginning of the twentieth century. For the first time the United Siberian alphabet (*edinii sibirskii alfavit*) was adopted in 1929 and it was decided that it should be based on the Roman alphabet (Latin script). Several reasons contributed to the adoption of the Roman-based alphabet; among them was the desire of the Soviet government to unite speakers of Siberian languages, to create possibilities for Siberian peoples to communicate with other ethnic groups both inside and outside the nation-state (e.g. Sami in Finland), and also to simplify the process of literacy (Grenoble and Whaley, 2006). But by the 1936 priority was given to Russian language with the Cyrillic script. The reason was intensified Russification as a direction of the Soviet ethnic policy in the 1930s (Bloch, 2004). The Soviets aim in the 1930s was to unite the country with a standardized language, education, vision. Russification was one of the means of achieving this goal.

In the 1920s, Russian linguists from Moscow and Leningrad were sent to Siberia in order to document and analyze the languages of the peoples there. Such a “top to bottom” approach to language research was arguably inappropriate for indigenous languages in Siberia

³⁰ An online article “90 years ago Tungus asked to save them from communism” URL: <http://asiarussia.ru/blogs/6155/> my translation

where there are languages from different families, each having several dialects. This led to language documentation in which the Evenki language with its distinct 14 dialects and 51 sub-dialects was condensed into one standardized Evenki language established on the basis of Nepa dialect (Gilbers, Nerbonne, and Schaecken, 2000; Rodopi, Jones, and Mari, 2013). This is the reason the Evenki people refuse to study this artificially created, alien language. Grenoble (2000) asserts that these 51 dialects differ from each other not only by phonetics and lexicon but also by different morphosyntactic features.

Interestingly, after the January 2014 Arctic Frontiers conference, which was held in Tromsø, I was talking to an old Sami reindeer herder from Finnmark³¹. He was telling me and another Evenki girl who came from Saint Petersburg a story about his childhood. As a child, he contracted a disease and was sent to a hospital somewhere in the west of Norway. There he was introduced to another Sami boy because that boy had better skills in Norwegian and could help him to explain himself to a doctor. He was surprised and disappointed not to be able to understand the other boy who was speaking Sami. This story illustrates the lexical difference between two languages. I would assume that Evenki languages had had the same problem and the unified established language has been of little help in the preservation and revitalization process.

Glafira Vasilevich has done the most prominent work on the Evenki dialectology at the beginning of 20th century. Her work became the very first step in documenting and analyzing the Evenki language from all over Siberia. In her *“Essays of Evenki dialects”* (*“Ocherki dialektov Evenkiiskogo yazyka”*, 1948), Vasilevich writes about differences and similarities of most of the dialects and sub-dialects (*govor*). The main conclusion she makes in her monumental work is that Evenki dialects mainly have a large lexical variety, but are grammatically of the same origin and do not differ much. The history of changes in the Evenki language use is very controversial and interesting.

“The Evenki from different regions poorly understand each other only the first couple of days. After, they catch the phonetic correspondence and get used to it” (Vasilevich, 1948: 7).

In 1931, the first written Roman-alphabet Evenki language was established on the basis of Nepa dialect which was spoken in Irkutsk. For most of the Evenki this dialect was quite foreign because of a wide variety of dialects and sub-dialects. An interesting fact is that

³¹ Finnmark county is the northernmost county of Norway, home of the Northern Sami language URL: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Finnmark>

the dialect, which became the basis for the current literary Evenki language, is not spoken anymore (Grenoble and Whaley, 2006; Joseph et. al. 2003). In 1936-7 the alphabet was changed to Cyrillic and finally in 1952 at the All-Union Conference on the Languages of the Peoples of the North it was declared that the literary Evenki language will be based on a sub-dialect spoken in the Evenki autonomous region. Again, the choice of a literary language base was made not by Evenki themselves and the reason for the shift was not publicly explained (Bulatova and Grenoble, 1999).

The first official step of the politics of developing literacy in Siberia minimized indigenous peoples' participation. It determined the entire modern history of the indigenous peoples of the Far North and even now creates difficulties in linguistic issues. For instance, some Evenki elders prefer not to use dictionaries and books written in the "western" dialect, which is almost foreign to them. They say that the lexical and phonetic differences are so great that trying to understand this "western" dialect is almost like trying to understand a different language. I personally have some problem with these dictionaries because I rarely can find Evenki words I remember from home in dictionaries.

2.5 THE SOVIET POLICY OF FORCED SEDENTARIZATION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE (the 1930s)

The main changes for Evenki as well as for other northern people in the USSR began in the 1930s when the Soviet government decided to reorganize production in the Far North and sedentarize the locals (Bloch, 2004: 38). Officially, the main political aim of the Soviets in the 1930s was collectivization. Collectivization was the political tool by which common property replaced private ownership for citizens of USSR and "collective efforts, collective labor" became the driving force of the Soviet economy. Basically it meant that indigenous people of Siberia who were mostly nomadic had to settle down to contribute to the state's welfare. Moreover, reindeer herders had to give away reindeer to collective farms and hunters had to hunt a particular amount of animals. Thus, their main philosophy of a traditional ways of life in harmony with nature was broken (Sillanpää, 2008).

Moreover, Siberia became a huge industrial complex where small numbered indigenous people were expected to welcome and host newcomers. About a million new people came to the North in the period of 1926-1932. However, newcomers were not always welcome (Slezkine, 1996). From local history and my family's stories I know that Evenki

knew about gold and other minerals, but were never interested in them. Instead, many Evenki, as well as other indigenous people of Yakutia, hid gold from Russians and sometimes they were killed due to unwillingness to help in its search. They hid minerals because indigenous people did not see gold as a wealth, instead, they perceived it as a danger (Zolotarev, 1947).

According to Bloch, an anthropologist, Professor in British Columbia and author of the book *Red Ties and Residential Schools*, with the introduction of *arteli* (the simplest hunting units) Evenki had to change their reindeer husbandry organization system to more joint herds and collective use of equipment and labour (Bloch, 2004). When Soviets began collectivization and introduced “*kolkhozy*” (*kollektivnye khoziaistva*) Evenki (as well as other indigenous people in the Far North of USSR), became disadvantaged. Anderson, an anthropologist who dedicated his life to researching Evenki, underpins this point of view telling us that the most difficult and tiring work in some kolkhozes was done by the Evenki who lived in the poorest houses and received much less money than newcomers, i.e. Russian teachers and engineers who were allocated the highest salaries and the best housing (Anderson, 2000). Obviously, this undermined the self-esteem of indigenous people.

On the other hand, Anderson touches upon positive results of the Soviet policy in the 1930s. He asserts that many of Evenki youth who had received education during the 1930s became local leaders and, political activists who played large roles at the regional level of government (Anderson, 2000). I agree with Anderson and I personally know Evenki and Even people who became authors, researchers, and leaders after graduating from Russian universities after WWII. However, very few of those people could manage to preserve their native language.

Sedentarization had a dramatic effect on Evenki’s social organization, language use, and identity matter. Evenki historically lived in small extended families and drove reindeer, while also gaining subsistence by hunting and fishing. During the collectivization period, Evenki as well as other Siberian peoples had to settle down and start communal herding where former values of the traditional way of life had little significance for a settled style of living and collectivization. Identity is not only about self-consciousness, but it is also about belonging to an area, a group, an ethnic group, pursuing a certain way of life and activities. Indigenous peoples’ belonging in various aspects of life that were all important to them has stopped with sedentarization. Identity crises owing to the shift from nomadism and hunting for one’s subsistence to a sedentary way of life and hunting for the good of the state, and has led to negative social consequences for indigenous peoples of the Far North.

2.6 SOVIET POLICY OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS FOR INDIGENOUS CHILDREN (post-WWII)

Anderson (2000) in *“Endangered peoples of the Arctic: Struggles to survive and thrive”* refers to 1948-1967 as a period of forced resettlement of indigenous nomadic people of Siberia. However, he describes the 1930s as the best time for Evenki to learn both Russian and their mother tongue, since teachers who were sent from the central Russia travelled with reindeer herders’ families and taught Evenki children in sort of nomad schools. Also, early farms were subsidized by the state and Evenki were getting continuous support and employment. However, good times did not last long and after World War II these approaches were replaced by forced resettlement and the forced education of children of nomadic indigenous peoples in residential schools.

On one hand, the benign will of Soviet policy was to make peoples of the North literate. On the other hand, Russians had seen the potential dangers in Siberian indigenous peoples. Their unknown languages seemed hostile to conquerors and that is why I think the term “alien” came to be used both in the spoken language and even in an official document of Tsarist Russia, *“The Statute of Alien Administration in Siberia 1822”* (Slezkine, 1996; Sillanpää, 2008). Since that time indigenous people have been associated with “others”, “different”, “uncultured”. The aim to make people *“cultured”* did not take into consideration either the traditional ways of life of indigenous people or their right to study their mother tongue.

As previously mentioned, Evenki language has several dialects; some of them are not spoken now. But before Russians came to Siberia, all of the Evenki dialects had not only been existing units of one language, but also belonged to a particular region, clan, and family. When the resettlement and education of children in boarding schools started after WWII, many Evenki parents noticed their children’s poor ability of to speak their mother tongue when they would return for summer holidays from residential schools. Children were taught in Russian, even though Evenki language was included as a subject and was taught as a fundamentally different language, artificially established on the basis of the “western Evenki dialect” (Freeman, 2000: 65). Thus, many children could neither preserve their mother tongue, nor save their identity of belonging to their clan and particular dialect which was tightly connected to geographical area.

As for children, forced education came into full power in the late 1940s. My grandmother was born in 1948 and at the age of eight was put in the residential school in the

Aldan region. She spoke only Evenki when she came to the school and indigenous children were prohibited from speaking their mother tongue. The education was only in Yakut and teachers spoke Yakut to them. She remembers that time with bitterness and sorrow. I have always noticed how humble and modest my relatives are. They never said bad things about other people, they never complained about how they have been mistreated, how hard it was to be taken from home and forget the smell of taiga. They just kept silent but I know they felt sorry for everything that happened because of the political system that existed at the time.

*“(T)here seems to be no doubt that among the Siberian peoples in their original state a certain harmony with nature existed, if only as a reflection of unavoidable conditions in which they lived. These conditions embraced the realities of survival in an often hostile environment, and the mysteries of birth and death. ... **Their lives, in short, were not spent in misery before the Russians came among them.**” (Sillanpää , 2008:19)*

2.7. SUMMARY

In this chapter I introduced the main milestones of Evenki history from time immemorial until present times. Moreover, I discussed the consequences of the Soviet politics towards indigenous people such as sedentarization, residential schools and the Russification. However, in the Soviet era, indigenous people gained an opportunity to become educated, and to save their languages by acquiring written form. The question of suitability of the means of the Soviets policies towards indigenous people and languages is still being argued.

Identity of indigenous people has been changed by these nation-building means. Language as an important attribute of ethnic identity was suppressed by the Russification. Children were put into residential schools and forgot their mother tongue. Traditional way of life as the main tool of practical articulation of an ethnic identity has been politically shifted by collectivization. Nevertheless, Evenki have always resisted the politics of the Soviets. In the end, the only way to transfer Evenkiness was through traditions, habits, and beliefs. The main challenge of my thesis is to question how Evenkiness has survived and discuss its role in the Evenki language revival.

CHAPTER 3

THE DILEMMA OF ETHNIC IDENTITY. SOMEWHERE I BELONG

3.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is devoted to the analysis of the ethnic identity articulation of the Evenki people. This includes the history of the Russification as the main assimilatory policy which shaped the identity of indigenous people in Russia. Moreover, Norwegianization is also discussed in order to give the reader an overview of the situation with the Sami people in Norway. My concept of the three post-1945 Evenki generations is the core of the analytical discussion. The Stolen Generation are the Evenki children born soon after WWII, whose childhoods were spent in the residential schools of the Soviet epoch. The Lost Generation are the children of the Stolen Generation and Generation Hope are the Evenki who were born around the 1990s and grew up in the Russian Federation.

This chapter explores the Evenkiness as a naturally transferred knowledge among generations. Furthermore, factors which informed the emergence of the new Evenkiness will be discussed. Theoretical discussions by Eidheim and Olsen are used to analyze the ways of articulating Evenkiness in society and its transmission to younger generations within the context of a political situation and attitudes towards indigenous peoples in Russian society.

The chapter is divided into three interconnected discussions about the ethnic identity of the three generations of Evenki. They each have their own specific history, way of articulation of their Evenkiness and language dilemma. This chapter and chapter four are based on findings from the field work in Yakutia, namely ten interviews with three generations of Evenki.

The Stolen Generation representatives:

Two of my informants are elderly Evenki from Evenki villages in different regions of Russia; they are both retirees now. One of them speaks several Evenki dialects and has been working on Evenki issues as a journalist for decades. I did not arrange interviews with them. Furthermore, I count the conversations with these two informants as naturally occurring data (Silvermann, 2013). We were discussing the history of the Evenki people and I found the information which was brought up during the conversations useful for my research. I will refer to them as Informants F and G.

The Lost Generation representatives:

Informant D is an Evenki woman (born in early 1960s) from an Evenki village in Western Yakutia, who lives and works in Yakutsk. She works in the Department for Peoples of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), does not speak or understand Evenki.

Informant C is an Evenki man (born in the early 1970s), originally from the Amur region, who currently works and lives in Yakutsk. He is Senior Researcher at the Institute of Humanitarian Studies of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberian Academy of Sciences, and one of the developers of an Evenki language electronic resource. He is a self-taught Evenki speaker.

Informant E is an Evenki woman (born in the early 1970s) from an Evenki village in Southern Yakutia, who lives and works in Yakutsk, at the Institute of Humanitarian Studies of Indigenous Peoples of the North. She writes and reads Evenki and has a comprehensive speaking level.

Informant H is an Evenki woman (born in the late 1960s) from an Evenki village in Southern Yakutia, who lives and works in Yakutsk. She does not speak Evenki language.

Generation Hope representatives:

Informant A is a young Evenki woman (born in the late 1980s) from an Evenki village in the South of the Republic of Sakha, who has lived in Saint-Petersburg and studied at the Institute of People of the North, Gertsen Institute. She has intermediate level of the Evenki language.

Informant B is a young Evenki woman (born in the late 1980s) from an Evenki village in the South of the Republic of Sakha, who lives and works in Saint-Petersburg and has a comprehensive understanding of the Evenki language.

The last two informants speak Evenki, they work as teachers of the Evenki language. Informant J is also a student at the North-Eastern Federal University (hereinafter NEFU) in Yakutsk at the Northern Department of the Philological Institute there. Informant I is a teacher at the one and only ethnic-based school in Yakutsk where Evenki language is taught as a subject. Informants J and I were born in the 1970s-1980s.

3.1 STORY OF MY IDENTITY. BETWEEN TWO CHAIRS. NEITHER HOME, NOR FOREIGN

I was born in the Evenki village of Kutana in 1990, at the time of the Soviet Union's collapse. The activities of my family have been based on the Evenki traditional way of life. All my male relatives were hunters; they brought our meals from the forest. Reindeer meat, liver, antlers, bear meat, fat and many other delicacies were our daily meals. My childhood was amazing; I was a child of the forest. I knew how to make a bonfire, what kind of bush one can use to make tea of, how to fish. My dream was to learn to hunt. 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"³².

When we moved to Aldan, a town in Southern Yakutia where the majority of the population is Russian, I came to know that I belonged to a Yakut ethnic group. My classmates and other Russian people called me Yakut, and I did not deny my Yakut origin at the time, at the age of eight. Moreover, I did not know the difference between Yakut and Evenki people, since I lived in a place where everyone spoke Yakut but many people called themselves Evenki. But the main blow to my identity happened when my family moved to Yakutsk, the biggest city and the capital of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). I could not speak Yakut language, I spoke only Russian. Yakut pupils at school bullied me because of my language difficulties and called me arrogant because I could not understand them. I did not understand why a language issue could be the reason for such behavior. Moreover, I felt the difference between me and them. So, by the age of fifteen I no longer had the feeling of Yakut identity,

³² Evenki in their folklore often referred to a bear as an ancestor of Evenki people. That is why Amikan or Amakan have a meaning of both «a bear» and «a grandpa», see Varlamov URL: <http://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/obraz-medvedya-predka-v-folklore-i-mirovozzrenii-evenkov>

not being able to communicate in Yakut language and being bullied for that. But I learned the language from friends, so now I can speak it fluently.

When I came to Norway for the first time, I was asked many times about my ethnic identity. People wanted to know why a person from Russia doesn't look like a typical Russian (blonde with blue eyes). When I told them that I was from the Eastern part of Russia, Siberia, precisely from the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), they asked me then if I was a Yakut. At that time I learned about the Sami people, culture, and Saminess as people's identity. I had seen the beautiful Sami costumes, heard joik, and seen exhibitions and documentary films about the nomadic life of the Sami. I made parallels in my mind; I remembered what my grandparents told me about nomadism and how they had to settle down in a foreign region. I recognized the similarities of their songs and epos, their endangered language and beautiful culture. I realized my belonging to an indigenous community. It was a long road, as there were plenty of identities I tried to relate myself to before.

My biggest internal dilemma was to identify myself and then to explain to myself how one can be Evenki without the ability to speak Evenki. I speak four languages now - Yakut, Russian, English and Norwegian. Earlier I thought that one cannot be a representative of an ethnic group if he/she cannot speak his/her mother tongue. In order to investigate the processes of indigenous languages' revitalization in the modern world I am writing my Master's thesis. The main driving force of the revitalization of indigenous languages, and particularly Evenki, I see in an awakened indigenous ethnic identity, in the *new* Evenki indigenous identity, the new Evenkiness.

3.2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION. THE RUSSIFICATION AND NORWEGIANIZATION POLICIES

As a parallel to the Russification policy of the USSR, which was the official policy of the government in the 1930s-1980s, I would like to show here the results of the Norwegianization policy in Norway, which began in the 1850s (Minde, 2003). Eidheim (1969) refers to Norwegianization as the main effort of the state of Norway to influence on an ethnic identity of the Sami. Therefore introduction of this politics is necessary in this chapter.

The first indigenous people I encountered who openly stated their ethnic identity and have been proud of it were Sami people. I was surprised when we, international students, came to Tromsø, and were introduced to the Sami culture, the Sami history in Norway

through exhibitions in Tromsø museum and art installations on the university campus. I realized that both the history and the culture of Sami and Evenki people are similar. First, some of the Sami and Evenki have both led a nomadic lifestyle, and have been hunters and gatherers. The belief systems of Evenki and Sami are close. The main difference between Sami and Evenki societies in their articulation of ethnic identity and ways of its development due to political, economic and social conditions will be discussed further in the chapter.

My choice to use the experience of Sami people in Norway is based on the common historical background they share with Evenki and all indigenous peoples in the Far North and Siberia. Both Norwegianization and Russification aimed to create a homogenous society by providing education in Norwegian and Russian respectively. The consequences of these policies were the same by the 1970s; Evenki language was spoken only by approximately 30% of the Evenki population, Sami languages have also been severely endangered and around 30% of the Sami spoke their mother tongue³³. However, the current situation concerning indigenous issues and language revitalization is different in Russia and Norway.

Sami children in Norway were forced to go to residential schools, being far away from home for six months at a time due to the state policy of nation building. Children are the future of their peoples, and by being raised within their own culture learning their native language from their parents they become culture itself. In order to suppress the distinct Sami culture, the Norwegian state began a harsh policy of erasing the Sami culture and language. The biggest efforts were made in the school education for Sami children; residential schools were the main territory of battles between new little pupils separated from their parents, and teachers who were encouraged to implement an assimilation policy (Minde, 2003).

Sami children were not allowed to speak Sami at school even during breaks, teachers taught Sami pupils in Norwegian – an absolutely unknown language for them. Such a brutal pedagogical method was officially paid for by Finnefondet (The Lapp Fund), a fund established by Stortinget (the Norwegian Parliament) to provide means for the Norwegianization policy. Furthermore, teachers who presented the best results in the replacement of Sami language with Norwegian language would get a special scholarship called Finnefondstillegg (Minde, 2003). As illustrated in Chapter 2, Evenki children, as well as children of indigenous people of Siberia and the Far North of the USSR, shared the same experience. It is noteworthy that the UN Committee for Children's Rights has published information about the groups of indigenous children who have been affected by

³³ Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Sami language URL:
http://www.ethnologue.com/search/search_by_page/sami

discrimination, and in the Republic of Sakha there were 5,657 indigenous children like that (3,235 Evenki, 2,158 Even, 165 Ukaghir, 123 Chukchi) (UNICEF, 2002).

When indigenous children were deprived of their families, their futures and the futures of their ethnic groups changed. Adults could not transfer indigenous knowledge and the mother tongue to the next generation, and children of nomadic indigenous people came home with neither their native language nor the skills to help with herding. Notably, the experience of Stolen Generations³⁴ is common for many indigenous peoples around the world during the twentieth century, when the assimilation of indigenous population was the main policy of building the nation states. As for the Norwegianization policy's consequences concerning Sami population in Western Finnmark in the 1950s-1960s, Olsen refers to Eidheim's article:

“When he arrived in the municipality, he did not recognise any cultural features that reflected a split within the apparently homogenous population (1971: 51–52). Instead, the locals emphasised their Norwegian identity, their competence in modern fisheries and farming, their modern housing, kitchens, and their cleanliness in accord with Norwegian hygienic standards. All conversations were held in Norwegian – even if it was often slightly broken” (Olsen, 2007: 78)

Moreover, Eidheim, in his Master's thesis in 1958, describes the problems of the Norwegianization as an “accumulation” of the population of Inner Finnmark (Minde, 2003). The Soviet government pursued the same goal when applying the collectivization policies and the forceful sedentarization of the indigenous people (Freeman, 2000).

Here I should make a remark that the situation concerning politics toward the indigenous population in USSR has many peculiarities. First of all, in the USSR, forced relocation and education of children in residential schools varied from region to region. Thus, Evenki children in some regions could avoid boarding schools and some of them were so lucky that they can now still speak their language. I personally know two Evenki women not from the Republic of Sakha but from Western Siberia who are native speakers not only of their own dialect, but of several dialects. Second, in regions where the industrial development was not very active and Evenki villages (here temporary settlements of nomadic people) were far away from mining deposits, Evenki were able to preserve their language, identity and traditional way of life (Informant C). Newcomers - builders, industrial workers and so on - did not come to the villages and the local Evenki population did not have much contact with

³⁴ the notion used in Australia where children have been forcefully removed from families in the period 1909-1970 (“The Stolen Generations: Marvin Hanisch”), but here in MA I will use the term to refer to a generation of Evenki that was forcefully taken from home and parents and put into residential schools

non-Evenki; therefore, they could avoid assimilation. Third, in the Republic of Sakha (or for instance in the Republic of Buryatia) where two languages (Russian and Yakut, Russian and Buryat respectively) have official status, people are multilingual. Thus, some Evenki speakers are already trilingual when they study English and other foreign languages these respectively become the fourth and the fifth languages for Evenki pupils. This has definitely had a huge influence on both the language use and the identity of indigenous people

3.3 IDENTITY AS A SOCIAL STIGMA. THE STOLEN GENERATION

According to Bloch (2004), who based her work on an Evenki district in the USSR, “*after World War II, residential schooling became a defining feature of indigenous Siberian identities*”. In order to explain the consequences of assimilation policy, I use the concept of the Stolen Generation. Stolen generations in literature are mostly known as children of the aborigines in Australia who have been taken from families in 1906-1969 (Haebich, Delroy, and Patuto, 1999). In this thesis I refer to the Evenki who were born after WWII, in the 1940s-1950s as representatives of the Stolen Generation. The Evenki who were put in residential schools were away from home and their parents for half a year or an entire year. The factual removal from families led to identity crisis and language shift. In the end indigenous children were not able to speak mother tongue (Bloch, 2004). Stolen from home, stolen from their own family and culture, those children became a Stolen Generation.

One of the glaring examples of identity crisis of an indigenous child in Norwegian literature for me is «Skolegutt», a story written by Laila Stien (1979). Little Mattis is a pupil in a residential school in Northern Norway in the 1950s, he has a Sami family, and he is a Sami boy. His daily life is in school, where the teacher speaks Norwegian, and sometimes what the teacher is talking or signing about does not make sense for Mattis. The children learned “Fader vår” (the Our Father prayer) by heart and did not understand the meaning of it since Norwegian was not their mother tongue and they were not taught it well, the way it should be taught.

When Mattis returns to his family during winter holidays, he realizes that he has lost his skills in managing the reindeer, and his father gets angry. He begins to think of his own family as not being part of the intelligent world where the Norwegian language is the main attribute of wealth and a good life. He asks himself constantly what it means to be Sami and what it means to be Norwegian. He cannot decide which side he should take and which path

to follow. But in the end, he concludes with the splendid saying “Gud forstår alle språk” (God understands all languages). This example illustrates the situation which was happening with indigenous children in many countries. As it was mentioned in the previous chapter, Evenki children had the same experience in the residential schools.

Language as a visible attribute of ethnic identity

When one is stigmatized for one’s ethnicity, it affects one’s self-esteem and identity, and creates feelings of inferiority. Constant suppression and discrimination based on ethnicity had led to dramatic social-psychological consequences in the self-consciousness of indigenous people. Several informants who spent their childhood and youth in residential schools during the 1950s-1960s in different villages in Yakutia and Amur region highlighted the domestic discrimination in schools. Pupils were prohibited from speaking Evenki language and if they did so, they were punished by teachers (Informant F). Language was the main discriminatory factor, which made Evenki pupils understand the inferior status of their mother tongue.

Two of my informants are elderly Evenki women, representatives of the Stolen Generation, have totally different stories. One could use her mother tongue due to education in Evenki and because she grew up in a village where the majority of the population was Evenki. Another informant got her education in Russian and Yakut and grew up in a village with a mixed Yakut-Evenki population.

“When we came back home to summer holidays, it was hard to speak Evenki. We were re-trained, 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” (Informant F)

But on the other hand, another informant shared her own story about the use of Evenki language:

*“I do not understand why they (other Evenki) just gave up. How it has happened to us (all Evenki), that we just lost everything we had? At least our language could have been alive now if we all did not give in. One must speak one’s own language, because most people **could speak** during Soviet time, but they were pretending as if they did not understand what I was saying when I approached them. My mother, she spoke such good Evenki, but when our aunt came to visit us, they were using Yakut-Russian. How can one accept that people just avoided communicating in their mother tongue?” (Informant G)*

One of the reasons why Evenki did not communicate in Evenki was that they forgot the language, some of them intentionally, some not. As one of my informants explained, it was hard to stay fluent in language because their parents did not speak Evenki at home, but they used it as a *secret language* when they wanted to keep a topic secret. The same situation is described by Eidheim, but in a sense that Lappish (Sami language) was “used only in situations where trusted Lappish identities were involved” (Eidheim, 1969: 286). Hence, some Evenki parents of the Stolen Generation did not try to or were not successful in transferring the Evenki language to their children. Unfortunately, in some Evenki villages people now do not use Evenki language at all. In some villages, for example in the Kutana where informant F and I are from, Evenki has not been spoken since the 1970s, or spoken as a secret language but not transferred to the next generations.

Another reason why Evenki people sometimes preferred to communicate with each other in either Russian or Yakut is that Evenki language has many different dialects, as mentioned in Chapter 2. When Evenki from different regions met each other, it seemed to them that they spoke different languages. According to Mamontova, the Evenki identify each other by the dialects, the way of expression and the use of the Russianized Evenki language (Mamontova, 2013). Moreover, she describes a situation when an Evenki person, a woman, who came from a city in Krasnoyarskiy Krai (the region in Siberia where the former Evenki autonomous region used to be) to an Evenki village to work. This Evenki woman stopped using Evenki language in communication with the local population because she was mocked for her use of a different dialect (Mamontova, 2013). This story illustrates the difference between perception of the dialects by Evenki in the middle of the twentieth century and in present times. In Chapter 2 the conclusion of Vasilevich about variety of the Evenki dialects seems to be out-of-date³⁵. Thus, in the present circumstances of severe endangerment of the Evenki language, it might be more difficult to adjust to variety of dialects. Therefore, discussions by Mamontova (2013) and Vasilevich (1948) might be a bit controversial.

Third reason I was introduced by several informants was that Evenki who were fluent in their mother tongue considered their moral obligation to speak Russian when other people were present. “Evenki thought it was indecent to speak mother tongue when people from other ethnic groups were present. So, one can offend a guest” (Bolina 2011:11). Thus, in multiethnic society, Evenki spoke most of the time in other than their own languages.

³⁵ See also p. 31

Language conflicts and their role in multilingualism and language shift

Even though the Evenki language was not spoken in society, parents of the Stolen Generation spoke it at home when Evenki guests were present, but they did not make it the language of communication with children (Informant F, G). First of all, as has already been said, Evenki children were bilingual and in some cases trilingual. In Yakutia Evenki people who speak their mother tongue speak at least three languages - Russian, Yakut and Evenki (Grenoble and Whaley, 2006; Joseph et. al. 2003). To raise a child in a multilingual society is a challenge for any parent. In the case of the Evenki, the priority of language use was usually given to the first official language - Russian, in which children were educated in schools, and then the second language, for example Yakut, which was the language of communication in the society. If parents decided to teach their children Evenki at home, provided they had time to do it, a child also got an opportunity to learn it at home. But in most cases parents did not try to make Evenki the main language of communication with their own children. Parents probably did not want their children to become overloaded by too many languages (Informants F, J, I). They wanted their children to be successful in education, in order to have a brighter future. Russian language was seen as an attribute of better life and opportunity for children to get higher education (Mamontova, 2013).

Secondly, as highlighted in the previous chapter, in the Soviet period the indigenous lifestyle, ethnicity, and languages were regarded in society as inferior. As far as I understood from my own experience, in order to make children's lives easier, indigenous parents would not transfer their native tongue to them and did not consider it important and essential. Eidheim describes the same attitude of Sami parents in Norway towards Norwegian language use:

“People in the fjord community think it is «necessary» and therefore «right» to speak Norwegian to children. They shall not have the same handicap as we have had” (Eidheim, 1969: 288).

However, other attributes of identity, such as belief systems, habits, customs and ways of thinking, were always at the center of home education. Intergenerational transmission of the Evenkiness is well illustrated in the reminiscences written by my mother, Lena Sivtseva.

Evenkiness (reminiscences written by Lena Sivtseva, May 2015)

I remember my grandmother Praskovia from my childhood, when I was around five years old. Grandma woke up very early in the morning, lit a stove and put a teapot on it. It was so every day, in the early morning, regardless the season. I got up with her, dressed and sat on the bench nearby the stove. Then grandma went to feed and milk our cows. Our family owned a big farm, and a kitchen garden. We also had pigs, chickens, horses and hunting dogs. Near Khabarovsk Krai my uncle took care of our reindeer. He was a career hunter and delivered fur to the state. Rarely did he come to us, mostly during winter time, when ice was on rivers. The most delicious he brought us was *øløønku* – cooked and dried in a specific way, cut onto cubes tasty pieces of reindeer meat. Every time he also brought us the whole bag of *øløønku*. *Øløønky* was a good snack for hunters during the hunt. Moreover, after a nut-hunt our relatives brought us bags of pine nuts.

My grandmother was half Evenki and half Yakut. She spoke three languages – her mother tongue was Evenki, and others were Yakut and Russian. My grandma and grandpa had many children, and many grandchildren. I am the eldest among their grandchildren. My mother worked as a vet doctor and she had to travel from one reindeer herd to another, from area to area. Therefore, I was often with my grandma. Sometimes I also went with my mother during the summer holidays.

My grandmother told me Evenki girls learned how to harness a reindeer from childhood, they cook food and learned sew clothes and shoes (*oloochu* – summer shoes *tarbaza*, *ømchuure* – winter shoes *tarbaza*, *suturuo* – mens' winter long shoes for hunting), and also they processed skin. When moving from place to place (Evenki people were nomadic before sedentarization), women gathered utensils in *mataga* (special bags made of suede), and when everything was perfectly packed, reindeer were harnessed. For transportation of babies there was a *bihik* (cradle, where a baby was in half-upright position), *bihik* usually was bound to a saddle. Older children rode independently on reindeer. Arriving at a new location Evenki quickly put together housing, chopped *setir* (spruce branches, which served as flooring in dwelling). *Setir* was changed according to its condition. On the new *setir* Evenki lit up the fire, baked Evenki cakes, cooked food. Food storage, seasonal clothes, utensils, hunting equipment except guns were all left in *holbo* (“*labazi*”) little hut of branches built on pillars. Due to their nomadic lifestyle Evenki could take only the most needed equipment and personal items.

Everything was compact and practical. Our ancestors periodically went to the shore of the Okhotsk Sea on reindeer. As my great-grandmother told, they went in order to trade: exchanging fur for Chinese beads, fabric, and hunting equipment.

My grandma, as every Evenki woman, had *avsa* – a small, plump fur bag with sewing accessories inside. As a little girl, I was always interested in what was inside of this bag, and I often asked permission to look at all of these things. Everything was there: pockets for thimble, threads, and many other useful things. It was a real store of treasures! My grandmother's *avsa* is now at my mother's home, pretty old and shabby. My grandmother sewed everything, from simple items to fur *tarbaza* and *unty* (winter shoes) and also fur hats, or *saginnyah*. Each summer I helped her cut and sew a new tent, because after a year the tent came into disrepair. We did this laborious work on the ground in the yard, because it needed a lot of space. Double seems we sewed very carefully, to make the tent waterproof and snow proof. All the summer and winter clothing, shoes and tents Evenki made on their own.

We granddaughters helped our grandma as much as we could. We made threads out of tendon, kneaded squirrel, sable, and reindeer skins. We sat in a circle, and grandma showed us how to do our tasks and we quickly made everything together. Thus, step by step we learned how to sew. However, we did not participate in the process of suede making *rovduga*. In the summer, grandma made the cone-shaped construction, out of pre-collected rotten wood on her own. Then this structure was covered with skins of treated suede, and kindled inside with a smudge of rotten wood. The process was long she turned the skin, threw rotten wood. The result was waterproof, yellow suede durable and soft, – *rovduga*. One could make *suturuo*, mittens, and jackets for hunting. Tools for tanning skins, deer legs and skins were made by my grandfather Nukuchan. These tools are still in perfect working condition; my mother uses them today. At each stage, we used different instruments: *kyhuah* shot scrapings; *chuchun* was spread already before cutting. Moose skin is very thin and rough, one cannot manage to knead it without a *talky* (wooden knead tool with “teeth”).

Grandma told us that girls cannot wear shoes made out of moose skin. Moreover, girls and women were not allowed to step on and walk on bear skin. One of the brothers of my grandma, Vasiliy, was a bear hunter. All my mother's brothers were good hunters, like their father, grandfather and all the ancestors. All their life and work has been associated with the taiga and forest. By nature they were soft-hearted, hardworking, and good people. When grandma was young, she hunted wild deer, squirrels, and other animals. She told me a lot of stories about my grandfather, how he made extraordinary decisions in emergency situations on the hunt, and during moving.

As I have already mentioned, my uncle hunted bears. In our region we have a lot of bears, but they are not hunted on purpose. It happened sometimes that a bear attacked cattle or came too close to the village. In the taiga, a bear is a mortal danger for a hunter. People have to protect themselves from this beast. When a bear was hunted, customs of our ancestors were strictly followed by our grandma and all our family. A bear is a cult animal. My grandma, in order to show respect to the bear, made a *guluk* out of the head of the bear, and tied red ribbons on it. Then she went far away in the forest and hung the *guluk* and bear's feet on a tree branch, and asked for forgiveness from a bear. In order to avoid problems with digesting, one should not drink cold water after eating bear meat.

Traditional Evenki dishes, thanks to my grandma, always were on our table. *Monin* (blueberries and cream), *haiah* (whipped butter with milk and wild strawberries), Evenki traditional pie, various meat and fish dishes, depending on the seasons, were always part of our diet. I remember how adults made dried meat to store. They cut the meat into long strips - belts, covered with a thick layer of salt, and hung them in the shade. They covered them with one layer of gauze and from time to time turned them over for even drying. Afterwards the dried meat was stored in a dry place. After soaking it in water, it was possible to prepare food from it.

In Kutana the first berries of the season are wild strawberry, then honeysuckle, then red and black currants, after that *ohta* (Aldan wild grape – it grows only along the Aldan River). In the late autumn, one can find a lot of cowberry. We loved to go to the forest with grandma to pick berries. When we were young we had small pail, and then bigger ones as we grew up. We went fishing and haymaking. Sometimes we swam in the river. During the autumn we collected mushrooms and harvested vegetables from the kitchen garden.

During a strong storm grandma always said “Arche Arche, goroli, goroli!” and thunder gradually abated. I also say this during storms “Arche, Arche, goroli, goroli!” all the while thinking of my grandmother.

My grandmother Praskovia was very gentle, decent, and honest person. She never said bad things about other people. She said: “Kebis, istiehtere” (Do not say bad things, someone will hear!). She had rich life experience, and a wonderful memory, especially regarding dates, hospitality, and generosity. I think our granny tried to educate us in a good way, to teach and transfer to us everything she knew.”³⁶

³⁶ My translation from original reminiscences

Thus, one may conclude, Evenkiness was transferred to children not by language, but by worldview, education in families, at home.

Ethnic identity of the Stolen Generation

The ethnic identity and self-awareness of the Stolen Generation among Evenki was not a matter of doubt, they knew the history of their own ethnic group and most of them were born in the taiga. Some of them, mostly men, were engaged in collective reindeer herding and worked as a *“kadroviy okhotnik”* (“carrier hunter” – a profession in which indigenous people were usually occupied, in the Soviet Union). In some villages of Yakutia hunting was predominantly the Evenki occupation and Yakut were usually not hunters (Informant F). Thus, the spheres of activities as reindeer herding and hunting were symbols of identity for Evenki people who maintained a natural cultural environment of the Evenkiness. Based on the difference of activity, people could recognize each other’s ethnicity (Informant F, G).

As was discussed in Chapter 1, Eidheim’s discussion concerning Sami identity articulation was built on three spheres: a public sphere, a Lappish (Sami) closed sphere, and a Norwegian closed sphere (1969: 287). Apparently, Evenki people had the same articulation model of ethnic identity during Soviet times. From the experience of elderly informants I found out that Evenki had their private sphere where elder relatives spoke Evenki to each other. Besides, the discussions about ethnicity among the Evenki who were not relatives (or just as close) were not supported if a topic occurred (Informant F).

It is hard to discuss the private sphere of the ethnic groups other than Evenki, for example the Yakut, due to the complexity of social relations. Assimilation processes have been so deep that one can hardly give a generalized overview about the private sphere of “others”, when others might be Yakut and/or Russian. However, the presence of ethnic boundaries in the case of Stolen Generation becomes clear from discussions with elderly Evenki:

“Children and sometimes adults called us “Tungus, tungus” and when we were children we said “you Tungus” as it was somewhat teasing word. We were different, people knew that. When our relatives came from taiga, people looked at our reindeer like something very strange” (Informant F)

When it comes to the public sphere the question of articulation of the ethnic identity is a two-sided situation. On one hand, there were Russification policy and the system of

residential schools, though no forced assimilation to Russian society in the case of Yakutia. Second, due to the several reasons Evenki had shifted their language, and in some cases, ethnic identity, to Yakut.

3.4 IDENTITY AS A PRIVATE MATTER – OR STILL A SOCIAL STIGMA? THE LOST GENERATION

The second generation of Evenki who experienced the Russification policy are the people who were born in the 1960s-1970s. Those children of Evenki who had been to residential schools were not familiar with the traditional Evenki way of life³⁷. This generation did not go to residential schools. They went to schools in villages and towns where their parents settled during the sedentarization period. However, the representatives of this generation, as well as the Stolen Generation, were aware of their origin, ethnicity and history of their own ethnic group. In the context of this thesis I will refer to these Evenki as a Lost Generation. I do it on purpose to explain the moment when the Evenki language stopped being an intergenerational transferred knowledge. In most cases the Lost Generation is the first generation which did not learn Evenki language from their parents at home, while most representatives of the Stolen Generation spoke Evenki during childhood.

One should keep in mind that the situation varies in different regions of Russia, depending on the population and the local history of Evenki villages. On one hand, there are several villages in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) where Evenki comprise the majority of the population and Evenki language is still used as a first language and a socially transferred knowledge. Furthermore, reindeer herding is still the main activity among the population (e.g. the Iengra village in Nerungri district, Yakutia). On the other hand, in most Evenki villages people do not speak their mother tongue and even though reindeer herding is maintained. The Lost Generation are representatives of the latter category of Evenki not only in villages but in urban environments, too.

However, the main peculiarity of the Lost Generation representatives is that they are aware of their origin from family and home. Three out of three informants of the Lost Generation stated a clear awareness of their own ethnicity:

³⁷ By traditional way of life I mean nomadism, private reindeer herding, hunting for own subsistence

“I always knew that I was Evenki. I was born in the Zhiganskiy district, now an official Evenki municipal region in Yakutia. But the language (Evenki language) has not been spoken there for a long time. My father did not speak Evenki. I grew up with Russians and Yakuts, but I always felt Evenki, and this is such a strange feeling, like on a mental level I felt Evenkiness. When I moved to Yakutsk, I was not ashamed of my origin, everyone knew that I was Evenki, the only thing was that I could not speak my mother tongue. But now I think, how much I could do if I was able to speak it” (Informant D)

One of the informants of the Lost Generation who have asserted that their ethnic identity has not been questioned stated that the Evenki origin was rather a matter of pride than a social stigma. However, two of the informants expressed a different state of things in the society. Here is a quote from one of them:

“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” (Informant H).

In the case of informants of Lost Generation we see the two controversial examples of articulation of ethnic identity and its position in the societies. While in one district the Evenkiness was perceived as equal to other ethnic identities, in the case of Informant H the inequality of ethnic identities was seen and felt.

Misrepresentation of indigenous people

Informant E describes that some indigenous people underestimate the uniqueness of their distinct ethnicity. Thus, indigenous people *“are used to thinking that their culture is of little significance and there is no point in learning their language, to show their own unique identity” (Informant E)*. The image of indigenous people in society in general is not always positive. Therefore, it has been more convenient for them to hide their own ethnicity and merge with the majority.

There are many examples of misrepresentation of indigenous people in Russia. For instance, in May 2014 Chukchi³⁸ sued the Big Russian Dictionary compilers for insulting and discrediting the definition of “Chukchi” which, according to the dictionary is firstly, an ethnic

³⁸ Chukchi are indigenous people of Siberia and the Far North, nomad reindeer herders

indigenous group, and secondly, “naive and narrow-minded people”³⁹. In fact, in the Russian language Chukchi should have the only meaning of indigenous nomadic people living in Chukotka, Siberia. During the Soviet period and even nowadays ethnic jokes about Chukchi people have been famous in Russian society and Chukchi are mostly represented in them as ill-educated and naive. The Moscow court declined the lawsuit to ban the dictionary and the official Big Russian Dictionary still contains the definition of Chukchi as a “narrow-minded people”⁴⁰.

In October 2014 indigenous students in Magadan found a poster in a city library which had a description of the reindeer herder life. The poster said: “... *if you do not want to work... just think about how reindeer herder lives: you herd the reindeer throughout the year, you have one holiday a year when geologists come to the herd and you exchange reindeer for vodka... you bathe twice in your life - at birth and when you die... so be thankful that you are not a reindeer herder in the Far North*”⁴¹.

The above examples explain how it is to be a part of a society where indigenous people are misrepresented, discriminated and discredited, even in official dictionaries of the Russian language and when a profession of a reindeer herder is associated with something negative. Moreover, one informant explains how indigenous ethnicity is suppressed by silent discrimination:

“But now (current time) one can see more and more how indigenous people are ignored... They (Yakut) will never admit that we did something well, they will keep it in the shadow. For example, the world medalist in freestyle wrestling, who is Even, was always mentioned in media as a true Sakha wrestler “Our great true Sakha man won this and that”. But no one mentioned that he is a true Even man, from an Even village, his parents are reindeer herders. Actually, he did not even know Yakut language before he came to Yakutsk” (Informant E).

Is there hope for an ethno-political movement of indigenous people in Russia?

Olsen’s discussion about Saminess today is based on a theoretical framework of three social spheres of identity articulation: first is the public sphere where some spaces allow expressions of a standardized Saminess; second is a public Sami sphere where the Sami self-

³⁹ Online information agency “Vesti” “Chukchi sued dictionary compilers URL: <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=1492660> published 14.04.2014

⁴⁰ Russian legal information agency “Moscow court declines to ban dictionary allegedly insulting Chukchi” URL: http://en.infosud.ru/judicial_news/20140526/271406413.html published 26.05.2014

⁴¹ Online information agency Magadan Media “Insulting joke about reindeer herders in the city library” URL: <http://magadanmedia.ru/news/kolyma/16.10.2014/393813/shutka-ob-olenevodah-v-odnoy-iz-bibliotek-oskorbila-magadanskih-studentov.html> published 16.10.2014

understanding is a driving force; and third is a private sphere where identities are continuously under negotiation (Olsen, 2007: 84). Olsen refers to the Sami ethno-political movement, which took place in the 1980s, as the main milestone of Saminess to become a private matter. Notably, the Sami ethno-political movement caused by the Alta dam construction raised thousands of voices, motivating Sami all over Norway to protect their own rights to land and to self-determination. The dam was built but Sami united and fought for their voices to be heard: “We lost the battle, but we won the war” Sami folk say to express their feelings of victory in a long war for recognition of their rights as indigenous people (Broderstad, 2011: 898).

Olsen’s theoretical idea is ahead of what is happening now in Evenki society in Russia. The Sami people have achieved considerable influence in the state of Norway. The Sami Act of 1987 became the main document defending Sami rights, then in 1988 came an amendment of the Constitution of Norway by Article 110a obliging the Norwegian state to enable Sami people to preserve their own culture and language (Broderstad, 2011; Constitution of Norway: Art 110a). The most prominent implementation of the right to self-determination of Sami peoples in Norway was the establishment of Sami Parliament in 1989. The Indigenous and Tribal Peoples’ Convention (No. 169/1989) of International Labour Organization which is considered the main international legal document securing indigenous peoples’ rights was ratified in Norway in 1990⁴². Recently significant changes emerged on the Norwegian political arena engaging Sami people and giving them the right of self-governance, land use and resource management. Those changes are Finnmark Act 2005 and Consultation Agreement 2005 between two equal political bodies – the Norwegian government and the Sami Parliament.

Evenki have not had an ethno-political movement yet. ILO 169 Convention is not yet ratified in Russia. However, indigenous peoples rights are constitutionally guaranteed, but not always practiced. Although there were many cases when Evenki were fighting for their land rights, none of them were paid enough attention in the media and none were well conducted. The letter of the Russian law often finds itself in disagreement with how it is applied, selectiveness for the sake of powerful peoples’ personal gain being a particular problem.

⁴² The official website of the International Labour Organization URL: http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:11300:0::NO::P11300_INSTRUMENT_ID:312314

For example, the case of the Evenki obshchina (community of indigenous people in Russia) of Dylacha in the Republic Buryatia is well-known among the Evenki⁴³. Dylacha (*a sun ray - Evenki*) is a family-clan based Evenki community with approximately 200 employees who were running a nephrite⁴⁴ extracting company in the Bauntovski Evenkiisky District, Baikal region, the Republic of Buryatia (Siberia, Russia). Suddenly, in October 2012, unknown armed and masked people came in two helicopters and attacked the offices of Dylacha and the nephrite storages.⁴⁵ Documents, hard disks and nephrite from the storages were stolen. The members of obshchina were arrested. This is apparently a case of a hostile takeover. Some representatives of the community have escaped and now are refugees, while the business is run by other people, who have no relation to the former Evenki owners. Two years of continuous struggle for their rights has recently reached its highest point. Hundreds of complaints and official letters were written, hundreds of officials have been involved; now the case has reached the Government of Russian Federation⁴⁶. Dylacha is now the hope of all Evenki in Russia: if they win, indigenous people will have a symbol of justice concerning indigenous people's cases.

The second case is called "The Power of Siberia", a gas pipeline project of Gazprom which is now being implemented. The construction project had two scenarios: first, building a pipeline through Southern Yakutia, the territory of Evenki people's reindeer pastures. The second plan was building it along the existing Eastern Siberia - Pacific Ocean (hereafter ESPO) oil pipeline which was also built on the Evenki land, after the Evenki agreement with Gazprom. In order to prevent the destruction of traditional areas of hunting, reindeer husbandry and nature reserves, Evenki from Tyanya nasleg (community) in Olekminskiy district appealed to the President of the Russian Federation. The Evenki expressed their wish for a gas pipeline to be constructed along the Eastern Siberia - Pacific Ocean oil pipeline, which is already built. The Evenki wrote that the new project would destroy even more pastures because it passes through the center of Evenki land. Literally, it will be a strike at the heart, threatening their very existence:

⁴³ International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs "The Russian Government shuts down the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON) URL: http://www.iwgia.org/iwgia_files_news_files/0710_Background_article_RAIPON.pdf p. 8

⁴⁴ nephrite is a mineral, type of jade URL: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nephrite>

⁴⁵ United Nations special Rapporteur's appeal to Government of the Russian Federation URL: [https://spdb.ohchr.org/hrdb/25th/public_-_AL_Russia_28.01.14_\(1.2014\).pdf](https://spdb.ohchr.org/hrdb/25th/public_-_AL_Russia_28.01.14_(1.2014).pdf)

⁴⁶ Official website of Dylacha created to support obshchina URL: <http://дылача.рф/index.php/novosti>

“The Eastern Siberia - Pacific Ocean oil pipeline is built on our pastures, gold mining is running in the South-east... We are not against progress and economic development, but we are all the time the injured party: we are deprived of reindeer herding pastures, hunting areas, our rivers are being polluted, running out of fish ... i.e. our traditional way of life - reindeer herding, hunting, fishing - is threatened”⁴⁷

It is hard to predict how the situation will develop during the construction of the Power of Siberia, but on the Gazprom website states that the pipeline will be built along the ESPO. It is quite difficult to find reliable sources of information because much of the information has been removed from websites during the last year.

Russia is a huge country where one ethnic group of Evenki lives in several regions and sometimes it happens that the group’s faction struggle to be able to help one another. The problem is not unwillingness to help, but the political situation and the media bias. Such a situation concerning indigenous issues in Russia does not underpin one’s self-esteem and freedom of identity expression. Now I understand the problem that one of my informants raised during our conversation:

“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?” (Informant G)

Probably the realization of one’s own inability to protect indigenous identity and own rights made indigenous people keep their own ethnicity and voices quiet.

The situation concerning indigenous issues seems controversial. On one hand, in Russia the Federal laws and the Constitution guarantee the special rights of the indigenous population⁴⁸. On the other hand, some informants observe the changing conditions and attitudes toward indigenous people.

“I think that there was more freedom for indigenous population before (during the Soviet period and in the early 1990s). Even after perestroika so many “indigenous” institutions were organized, we have had our own Institute⁴⁹. But now, even that was closed down. Of course, a lot of activities are organized for indigenous societies, for example, a Year of the

⁴⁷ Online information portal URL: <http://globalsib.com/9607/> “Evenki ask President of the RF to save pastures from pipeline building” published 15.02.2011

⁴⁸ Constitution of RF <http://www.constitution.ru/>, Federal Law of the Russian Federation №82-FZ “About guarantees of small-numbered indigenous peoples of Russia” URL: <http://constitution.garant.ru/act/right/180406/>, Federal Law of RF №102-FZ “About general principles of organization of communities of small-numbered indigenous peoples of Russia” <http://www.rg.ru/2000/06/20/obshiny-dok.html>

⁴⁹ Institute of humanity science and problems of the indigenous peoples of the Far North and Siberia

Arctic, but in reality nothing is done for the people of the Arctic during that year. Thank God, at least the reindeer herders are now getting a higher salary". (Informant E)

Based on what has been examined, I conclude that indigenous identity, while protected on paper, can sometimes remain a social stigma in Russia. From my own experience, my closest relatives and I rarely discussed the history of my family and our Evenkiness, and never in public. The model of three spheres of identities' negotiation between Norwegian and Sami developed by Eidheim in 1969 are still functioning for the Evenki in Russia, although indigenous people now try to make their voice heard, whereas spheres introduced by Olsen where Saminess has become a private matter, rather than a social stigma, fail to fit the current situation in Russia.

However, ten out of ten interviewees asserted that young people, of my age, have a larger interest in the history of our own ethnic group and mother tongue than their parents (i.e. the Lost Generation). All the informants expressed their hope and belief that the new generation will bear a new identity, which has a desire and an essential mission to save their own ethnos.

"Yes, I see now that Evenki youth are very active, and even some representatives of our ("lost") generation kind of "woke up"... Now people are willing to learn their own language; moreover, it might be some mechanism of self-preservation of ethnos, which starts in a critical epoch for an ethnic group... And I hope that young people who are appearing now will save our future" (Informant C)

3.5 THE IDENTITY OF GENERATION HOPE. THE NEW EVENKINESS

The first time I seriously thought about my personal identity was when I was twenty years old. Living in a multicultural society and being used to a mixed environment I never thought of myself as an indigenous person. I spent my childhood in an Evenki area, and so I do not know why my interest in Evenki did not arise earlier. In the process of investigating the reasons of the Evenki language loss I found the identity factor in language revitalization. The first interviews were undertaken with two young Evenki people (25 and 27 years old) from different Evenki villages in different regions of Yakutia. Notably, I met both of them during the conference "Arctic Frontiers 2014" in Tromsø. When I was talking to them, I felt that we shared a similar experience. Both interviewees asserted that their identity awakening happened at the age of twenty.

When I asked how they realized that their ethnic identity was a matter of pride, not shame, informants A and B answered that they went abroad to a conference/forum or met other indigenous people:

“When you are traveling and see other indigenous people, how beautiful they are, how they care about their culture and their languages, you start thinking of your own ethnic group and realize the uniqueness of your own culture and mother tongue. You become proud of being indigenous. But the education, broadening of worldview, and communication with other indigenous people play a big role in the identity state and self-esteem of an indigenous person. When you see how beautiful our culture is, your consciousness changes, and especially when you listen to smart educated people and understand how it is important to maintain your own culture” (Informant B)

I present the hypothesis that the globalization process plays a positive role in the Evenki case by uniting them on a common platform to share experiences, knowledge, and history. Not only ethnic identity comes out of this process, but also the belonging to a larger indigenous community. Moreover, a mutual indigenous identity, and larger indigenous kinship emerges as a result of such cooperation and activism. It is not a long time ago that indigenous people from Russia started going abroad to conferences, congresses, and working with international organizations. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, people obtained the possibility to go abroad easier, worship more freely, and collaborate with foreign companies, NGOs, and participate in indigenous conferences without having a special permission, which was an obligatory condition during the Soviet period (Kulski, 1954).

The new generation of the Evenki which I will name Generation Hope consists of the grandchildren of the Stolen Generation and the children of the Lost Generation. They are the people who did not experience direct oppression through the policies of assimilation, but who were born during the building of a new state – the Russian Federation. The new democratic state had offered to its people new politics, opportunities, new vision. Some informants refer to the changed political framework to explain the changes in identity articulation among the young indigenous population. Thus, the establishment of the new democratic state created opportunities for this new identity to emerge.

Based on my observations, I assume that Generation Hope are the Evenki who have multiple identities and different experiences of ethnic identity articulation, depending on their place of geographic location, educational experience, and family education. When I asked my informants how they felt about being Evenki they all told me the same:

*“Although in my village we all knew who Evenki were, that they are reindeer herders, I did not know that I am an Evenki. I thought that I was a Yakut person, half Yakut, and half Evenki. We had Evenki classes at school, but it was not cool to study Evenki, to participate in activities concerning Evenki language, **it was not prestigious**. But I do not know the current situation at schools, probably it is different now” (Informant A)*

*“We all three studied in a city. My brother is a city boy, he has never had an interest in Evenki culture. But my younger sister now worries about the language loss, she downloads books and learns Evenki on her own. I did not do that at her age, it came to her earlier than to me, maybe the situation changes, right? When I was at school, Russians offended us and of course nationalism was there, and negative feedbacks also. **I was ashamed to say that I was Evenki**” (Informant B)*

Vitebsky (2006) contends that identity can shift depending on circumstances, for instance, according to government benefits, or whether it is shameful or a matter of pride to be indigenous. This underpins the instrumental approach to ethnicity. The adaptability and choice of ethnic identities becomes clear from the discussion with Informant B. Anderson (2000) touches upon this phenomenon on the example of Khantayskie Evenki “...one could “tune into” (*nastroit*) being Evenki or Dolgan as one could tune a radio between channels” (Schweitzer et.al. 2000: 231).

However, comparative data regarding ethnic population of the Evenki presented in Census 1897 (64,500 people claimed to be Evenki in Tsarist Russia), 1989 (29,901 registered as Evenki in USSR), in 2002 and 2010 (35,377 and 37,843 people registered as Evenki in the Russian Federation respectively) shows decline of ethnic population of the Evenki throughout twentieth century and its steady increase in twenty first century⁵⁰. Apparently, the formation of the Russian Federation has opened new opportunities for ethnic identities of the indigenous people to be articulated. On one hand, the Evenki ethnic revitalization is seen in census and visible for the Evenki themselves. On the other hand, some Evenki shared their awareness of “phony” Evenki – people originally belonging to other ethnic groups who register themselves as Evenki and take advantage of being indigenous “on paper” (Informant A, I). Yet, what is the main condition for indigenous ethnic identities to become a matter of pride?

The role of education in a multicultural state. Why weren't we taught?

The main peculiarity of the societies in Russia lies in their multinational background. Russian education does not give either a full list of indigenous people of Russia, or the historical role of the aboriginal population and their traditional way of life. According to

⁵⁰ The peoples of the Red Book, Evenki <http://www.eki.ee/books/redbook/evenks.shtml>

Professor Khromenkov (2012) of the Pedagogical Department of Moscow State Regional University, there is a tendency of avoiding ethnic identifications in the textbook of Russian history in secondary school curriculum. Six aboriginal ethnic groups are mentioned fragmentarily, four of them are Caucasian people described in the light of ethnic deportation in the 1940s. Yakut people are mentioned in a situation of social unrest in 1986, Chechen people - due to the antiterrorist operation in Chechnya (2012: 36). Considering that Siberia, with all its indigenous populations, was colonized in the 17th century and many other regions of Russia have also been colonized and almost all of the ethnic groups could preserve their distinct culture and languages during Soviet times, it is quite a surprise that so few if any indigenous groups are mentioned in the curriculum. As Khromenkov (2012) highlights, such educational approaches form a background for a conflict environment in a multinational state.

Unawareness of people of multinational nature in one's own country creates not only conflicts but identity problems for ethnic minorities and indigenous people. I think my personal challenge of self-identification and previous lack of interest in my ethnic group's history and culture is caused by the absence of an appropriate cultural education. The economic situation, low salaries and the non-prestigious status of reindeer herding makes traditional activities a "business of elders", associated in Evenki society with a hard, underpaid job (Mamontova, 2013). Moreover, the image of indigenous people in Russia is quite exotic.

"Most people living in big cities, such as Krasnoyarsk, know only a collective image of the "ideal" Aborigine from the nineteenth century. News about the opening of the nomadic kindergarten or photos from an Aboriginal Day, occasionally appearing in the weekly regional newspaper, support this stereotype. Some still refer to the Evenki and other indigenous peoples of the North as exotic, children of nature. In the course of our conversation with a person from Krasnoyarsk, I realized that he is extremely skeptical towards ethnographers and Evenki, believing that the latter need to "be civilized" and become "normal citizens". "Why should I pay taxes for their hobbies?" – Has he genuinely he surprised about reindeer herders. My attempts to tell him about the modern reindeer herding ended in failure - new information was incompatible with the picture of the image of Aboriginal people" (Mamontova, 2013: 82)

Hence, it is extremely hard to protect one's own ethnic identity from underawareness and people's skeptical attitudes. Children are not taught at schools to be tolerant to ethnic identities of different ethnic groups and their traditional way of life in a multinational country.

In case of Yakutia, I heard and read many times about indigenous peoples being represented as "others" and even alienated by majority groups back home. I myself do not know who is Evenki and who is not, unless people tell me. The notion of indigenous peoples'

ethnic identity is quite challenging to explain in the present situation in Yakutia. For instance, now I tell my friends that I am indigenous and have always been Evenki but never spoke my mother tongue. Nevertheless, they perceive me as a Yakut and sometimes it is quite hard to make them understand that I am something other than Sakha, or both Sakha and Evenki. Remembering the fact that the majority of Evenki in Yakutia speak Yakut they apparently are considered as Yakut by Yakut people, if not known otherwise from before. Therefore it is quite difficult to recognize indigenous people in Yakutia, unless they do not talk about it openly.

Once I met a student in Yakutsk and we started talking about indigenous people, since it became a hot topic recently in the university, because of “indigenous scholarships”⁵¹. When he (student) learnt about my ethnicity, he started asking questions about authenticity of my ethnic identity. He openly told me his opinion, that there are no “true” Evenki, because “no one speak Evenki language”, “they (Evenki) forgot their culture”. His argument was mainly based on the assumption that people “have become” Evenki in order to acquire quotas, scholarships and any kind of material benefit of being indigenous. My attempts to give an example of myself and other Evenki people who do not receive any material support, failed. Unfortunately, these stereotypes about indigenous people are quite common in Yakutia. However, there are particular reasons for emergence of such stereotypes which will be discussed later in this chapter.

In the case of the younger generations it became harder to claim ethnic identity due to urbanization, multiple identities, and lack of “up-to-date” information about indigenous peoples and multiethnic nature of the Russian Federation. The fact that society is not fully aware of existence of the indigenous people, particularly urbanized indigenous people, undermines the possibility of negotiation of ethnic identities. Nevertheless, the emergence of a new identity of Evenki people is observed during the research and ten out of ten informants stated their awareness of the awakening of Evenkiness among youth and in general.

⁵¹ Indigenous students who have insert in their passports about their indogeneity and were permanently living in the compact settlements of indigenous people in Yakutia can ask for indigenous scholarships, which is higher than regular academic one

How has the new Evenkiness emerged?

In order to explain how Evenkiness has been transferred, I referred to three concepts of generation in this master thesis: Stolen Generation, Lost generation and Generation Hope. As was discussed earlier, the Stolen and Lost Generations were aware of their own origin, ancestors' way of life and own culture. The language was spoken by the Stolen Generation and in some rare cases was transferred to the Lost Generation and in this case the Lost Generation's representatives cannot be called completely «lost» generation, because they did not lose their language and probably thought of themselves as Evenki. In general, the Lost Generation did not transfer the Evenki language to Generation Hope. In some cases the awareness of Evenkiness was not transferred. However, most of the informants asserted the role of the family in their awareness of Evenkiness. They stated their worldview being «100% Evenki» especially when they encountered people from other ethnic groups living in the same region (Informant A). Thus, Evenkiness has been naturally transferred at home, even though the realization of Evenkiness came to some of the Evenki in the adult life⁵².

There are three separate examples of the emergence of a new Evenki identity among Generation Hope: Informant A, a PhD student working on an Evenki language project, born and raised in an Evenki village in a mixed family. This informant speaks Yakut, Russian and intermediate Evenki, as well as other languages. Informant B, a worker in an international association of traditional activity, born in an Evenki village in an Evenki family and bred in a Russian town, speaks Russian and can communicate in Evenki and other languages. Myself, a Master's student at the University of Tromsø in the program of indigenous studies, born in an Evenki village, to a mixed family, raised in a Russian town, then in Yakutsk, the multinational capital of Sakha Republic. I speak Yakut, Russian and other languages, but have little understanding of Evenki. We are all of the same age and share a common interest in Evenki language, identity and Evenki future. On the question *how* the Evenki identity came to each of us we replied:

Informant A:

“I think I am Evenki, I realized that four years ago, after I studied in Yakutsk, when I met many representatives of other indigenous peoples, after I worked with researchers, representatives of international and local indigenous organizations. It (identity) came to me gradually, step by step, layer by layer, it is a kind of foundation which was emerging inside

⁵² Here I should note that it is a generalization to discuss ethnic identity transfer from the Lost Generation to Generation Hope, since (it was highlighted in several paragraphs) Evenki in Russia have a significant variety of history depending on the region, clan, family and Evenki villages

me. Before I used to think of myself as a Yakut-Evenki person. But now I am just Evenki. If I see myself from outside, I see myself apart from Yakut society, I can say «they are Yakut». Our (Evenki) lexicon differs from their Yakut, we are more influenced by Russian language. When I came to Yakutsk I could not understand my classmates in many cases when they were talking Yakut”

Informant B:

*“I always knew that I was Evenki, but I was ashamed to reveal it before. I was not that interested in it, I remember I realized **that** in the fourth grade of university, when we went to an exhibition «Treasures of the North», and then the idea started to burn me from inside and then I began to attend to arctic research. Maybe the time came and I realized by intuition, I cannot explain that, I think it was meant to happen”*

Me:

“I did not know whether I was Russian, Yakut or Evenki until I was twenty. I have been interested in Evenki language and culture since I was a child when I realized that we were different from Yakut people. When we moved to Yakutsk I could not find a place in a big society, I did not see myself either among Russians or among Yakuts. I knew my culture was different. I could not understand why I did not know any Gods of Yakut religion, any national holidays, I felt like a stranger. I think it is a very big problem that indigenous people, culture, language are not represented on our curriculum. The most intense interest awoke when I was in Tromsø, where the Sami example inspired me to choose to apply for the Master’s program in indigenous studies.”

Thus, two informants and I listed both internal and external factors of the emergence of a new identity in their lives. As has been mentioned, globalization and education are the main external driving forces in the indigenous identity development. But on the other hand, the common idea of “something that led me to *that*”, the identity awakening, is explained by Informant C:

“...our (Evenki) youth takes the revitalization of own culture very seriously. Some of them give Evenki names to children, it shows the desire of the young generation, but it might be not just a desire but an essential mechanism of self-preservation of the ethnos, and it starts in a moment (better to say, epoch) that is critical for the ethnos. Secondly, the historical memory and experience: Evenki have gone through things that other nations could not withstand, they (Evenki) soaked in a capacity for revival and preservation. And finally, the growing importance of culture. Nowadays, society is experiencing changes in values, youth is different now. Music and literature are coming back into fashion, instead of an itch for money as it has been some time ago”

These discussions underpin the primordialist approach of ethnic identity as something “given”. However, according to my informants, given ethnic identity may sleep/be forgotten

and awaken/be revitalized. The changes of attitudes of Evenki towards their ethnic identity are also visible for Evenki elders, according to several interviewees. Some of my informants asserted that decades ago the Evenki in most Evenki villages were not interested in their own culture. Moreover, they questioned the need in activism towards our own language⁵³. Now the activism of both elders and youth is a common phenomenon.

“Everyone is welcome, no Evenki will say that you are not enough Evenki because you do not speak Evenki, we have all the facilities to learn the language. Our ancestors were strong, we are their strong offspring, and we should help each other to find a way” (conversation with Evenki youth (no record))

The main features of the new Evenkiness are: first, the interest in the history of one’s own ethnic group; second, the desire to learn and speak one’s own language; and third, an interest in indigenous activism. By indigenous activism I mean participation in indigenous forums, conferences, voluntary work in international indigenous organizations, and other activities which contribute to cultural awareness and common efforts for revitalization of ethnic identity and language. Moreover, Evenki of Generation Hope do not need to learn Russian the way previous generation had to, because former automatically get the Russian language skills in ordinary schools and their career won't be hindered - so they can now return to their Evenki roots without damaging their employment prospects.

Based on what has been said, I assume that although Olsen’s discussions are hardly suitable for the situation of Evenki in Yakutia, Generation Hope is a real example of ethnic identity becoming a matter of pride. Thus, due to the current situation concerning indigenous peoples in Russia, where indigenous ethno-political activism is more or less impossible, indigenous people find different ways of expressing their ethnic identity. Still, the stage of indigenous ethnic identity as a private matter has not fully come to the society in the Russian Federation – it seems that any ethnic diversity is not actually fully tolerated by the society in Russia, to be honest. Instead, in the case of the Evenki, the stage of new Evenkiness is coming to play its role in an interconnected world. Interestingly, the more the world becomes interconnected by the globalization, the Internet, and social networks, the more indigenous people in Russia are empowered and feel strength to express their identity.

⁵³ Informant G, Evenki ethnos in the beginning of the third millennium
http://window.edu.ru/resource/216/71216/files/evenki_2008.pdf

3.6 SUMMARY

The times are changing and people's identities are changing too. Olsen's theoretical suggestion tells us about the positive shift from two separate private spheres of Norwegian and Sami identities into two public spheres of the Sami identity and one private sphere where the clear distinction between the two former private spheres is rejected (Olsen, 2007). As Olsen argues, the positive shift has been caused by the ethno-political movement of Sami in Norway in defense of their own rights. As was highlighted, the present situation in Russia creates little space for an articulation of the indigenous identity in order to carry an ethno-political movement. Moreover, a phase of the stigmatization of the indigenous ethnicity (ethnic identity) in society is still continuing to some degree, as has been discussed earlier.

However, after the analysis made in this chapter the presence of the new identity among Evenki youth is also clearly visible. Yet this phase of identity as a private matter for Evenki (when the stigmatization stops and a negotiation of equal valuable ethnic identities appear) has not emerged. Thus, the new ethnic identity, new Evenkiness is a phenomenon which came in the place of an ethnic identity as a social stigma. I assume that the phase of an ethnic identity as a private matter which is discussed by Olsen has not yet been reached in the Evenki identity development. Instead, it is being substituted by new Evenkiness. Globalization and connectedness of the Evenki to other indigenous people by forums, conferences, educational programs contribute to the development of the new Evenkiness. Moreover, personal responsibility of the Evenki people for mother tongue revival which is now endangered language is also one of the factors of the new Evenkiness' emergence.

CHAPTER 4

EVENKI LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION PERSPECTIVES AND THE ROLE OF THE NEW EVENKINESS

4.0 INTRODUCTION

Language is one of the most important factors for identity formation. Skutnabb-Kangas in “Bilingualism or not” discusses different approaches to distinguishing a mother tongue. First, there are the following popular criteria: the mother tongue is the language one thinks in, the language one dreams in, the language one counts in. Second, the mother tongue is the language a child learns first. Third, this language includes the “competence factor” or is considered the language one knows best. Fourth, the mother tongue includes the “function factor” or the language one uses most. And finally, there is the “factor of attitude” or the language one identifies with, a social-psychological definition. The last factor is described this way: “the language passes on the cultural tradition and thereby gives the individual an identity which ties her to the in-group” (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981: 13).

Considering the fact that people can be born in one country and live in another, or in a multinational country like Russia, the first four principles of the mother tongue definition are not particularly useful for this Master’s thesis. My own example of language use illustrates the following: currently I think in English and Norwegian most of the time, since I am working on my English-language MA thesis and I live in Norway. However, my dreams are mostly in Russian, though I always count in Yakut. Furthermore, I consider my mother tongue to be Evenki, due to the fact my ancestors spoke it and I identify myself as Evenki. Therefore, I will use the final principle, the social-psychological definition of mother tongue.

In this chapter I will give a brief analysis of the conditions and perspectives for the Evenki language revitalization. Macro-variables of the national and regional levels, as well as micro-variables, including language attitudes, human and financial resources, will be touched

upon in this chapter. The legal background of linguistic rights will be discussed from a practical perspective, but not as a theoretical framework.

The question of this chapter is how, if at all, the new Evenkiness affects the Evenki language situation in Yakutia. In order to discuss it I used the theories of language ecology, rational choices of individuals and the theory of imagined communities.

4.1 ISSUES IN THE EVENKI LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION

Macro and micro variables - administration and legislation

As discussed in the second chapter, the administrative structure of the Russian Federation consists of three levels: federal, regional and local. The federal level of administration regulates the main policies for the Federation. Thus, federal budget, general directions of the state's politics and global plan of social welfare development are in the hands of the federal administration. The regional administration is responsible for general politics of a region and a regional budget, where republics and autonomous okrugs have more autonomy and independence. The local levels, i.e. the municipalities, govern their own affairs and organize the local environment according to the Constitution of the Russian Federation and the Constitutions of the Federal Units.

Constitutionally, subjects of the Russian Federation have equal rights to participate in decision-making, and equality within the federation is therefore ensured legally. However, there is one assumption of asymmetry within the federation - the linguistic aspect of the right to self-determination for republics and autonomous okrugs. Since republics and autonomous okrugs are units based on ethnicity, they have the right to enjoy their own culture and language in order to preserve their distinctiveness and traditional way of life. Indigenous people are given the right to learn their own languages. Moreover, indigenous languages in the Republic of Sakha are given official status in the compact settlements of the indigenous people.

Currently, the fundamental acts regulating the language policy for indigenous people are the Constitution of the Russian Federation, the Constitutions of the Units of the RF, the Law about Education (1992/1996/2002), the Law about the languages of small-numbered indigenous people of RSFSR (Russia) (1991/1998), the Law about guarantees for small-numbered indigenous people of RF (1999), the Concept of national educational policy of the

RF and other. According to these legal documents, the indigenous people in Russia have the full right to learn their mother tongue and obtain an education in their native language. Based on this, indigenous people's rights to preserve and maintain their own languages are secured both by federal and regional legislation. Particularly, the Republic of Sakha supports and secures five indigenous people's languages (Evenki, Even, Yukaghir, Dolgan, Chukchi) by the Law of the Republic of Sakha about statuses of languages of indigenous people of the Republic of Sakha⁵⁴.

The Republic of Sakha consists of 34 municipalities⁵⁵ and 586 villages, of which 79 are compact settlements of indigenous people⁵⁶. Thus, languages of indigenous people are granted official status in 79 villages. The first official language in Russia is Russian; therefore State education must be given in Russian. In the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), Yakut language is the second official language. There are many "national"⁵⁷ (ethnic-based) schools in Yakutia where the language of instruction is Yakut and many academic hours are devoted to Yakut literature and language.

Also, there are many ethnic schools where indigenous languages are taught. The Institute of Ethnic Schools of the Republic of Sakha plays a major role in the development and organization of such schools in Yakutia. For instance, the Institute of Ethnic Schools in collaboration with the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Sakha and the UNESCO office in Moscow has developed a program for a nomadic school⁵⁸. Yakutia is the one and only region where the concept of nomadic schools has become a functioning institution and is protected by law⁵⁹.

*"The project "Nomadic Schools" is a unique phenomenon in the Russian Federation. Yakutia is the only region where the law "On the nomadic schools" has been passed, by which this type of schools is granted legal status as an independent educational institution or its branches in areas populated by indigenous peoples. Thanks to this law, pre-school, general and further education has become available for people leading a traditional nomadic life. Children are now able to join the national culture, language, traditions and customs without leaving home"*⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Portal of the Government of the Republic of Sakha URL: <http://www.sakha.gov.ru/node/42148>

⁵⁵ Portal of the Government of the Republic of Sakha URL: <http://www.sakha.gov.ru/node/7849> ,
<http://www.sakha.gov.ru/node/12505>

⁵⁶ Portal of the Government of the Republic of Sakha URL: <http://www.sakha.gov.ru/node/7849>

⁵⁷ «national school» (natsionalnaya shkola in Russian) means «a school with language of instructions other than Russian» here and after «ethnic schools»

⁵⁸ Portal of the Government of the Republic of Sakha URL: <http://www.sakha.gov.ru/node/95937>

⁵⁹ Law of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) "About nomadic schools" URL:
<http://nlib.sakha.ru/knigakan/tematicheskie-kollektsii/kochevaya-shkola/zakon-respubliki-sakha-yakutiya-o-kochevykh-shkolakh.html>

⁶⁰ URL: <http://etnic.ru/about/news/kochevie-shkoli.html>, <http://www.raipon.info>

Macro- and micro variables. Practical matters

In order to discuss the federal support and economic part of the question, I will give a brief introduction to the Russian financial system. After the Soviet collapse, the decentralization policy developed in several ways - economically, institutionally and administratively. Economically, regions could now make decisions about taxes and redistribution of revenues in the regional budget, which is significant in a self-governing entity. Institutionally, regions became able to adopt laws and decrees concerning regional affairs. Administratively, regions could establish authorities to rule over territories and resources (Remington, 2012).

In the 2000s, the state policy of centralization came back to play its old role. Seven federal districts⁶¹ were established in order to ensure links between central and regional governments (Ross, 2002). Due to several reasons, taxation is the main source of problems. First, local governments have a lot of responsibilities in the Russian Federation, while the financial funding of those tasks comes from the regional and federal budget, creating a myriad of challenges for local authorities and the population. In particular, budget implementation rarely meets the requirements of the local and regional levels of federation. While the most prominent share of revenues is formed by regional and local revenues, the taxes are administrated in a way that the centre receives the most and afterwards redistributes finances by subsidies. This illustrates the dependence of the regions and municipalities on the federal budget and their limited ability to govern themselves.

Local and regional budgets accumulate wealth for the federal level and do not have enough resources for their own needs. Issues such as minorities' languages, if not prioritized by regional governments, are unlikely to receive economic support, simply because there are many other social and economic problems in Russia. Grenoble and Whaley refer to the official policy's role as one of the most important factors for endangered languages' revitalization. However, they note that, "*although states may have the obligation to protect linguistic rights, it is the responsibility of individuals to use them*" (Grenoble and Whaley, 2006). I agree that the attitudes of individuals, as well as the state's obligation to protect linguistic rights and diversity, are crucial for success of linguistic policies.

For instance, the Yakut language, as the official regional language in Yakutia, is maintained at kindergartens, schools and various other institutions, but higher education is

⁶¹ Currently there are nine federal districts URL: http://base.garant.ru/12119586/#block_2000

delivered in Russian. The Yakut language is thriving, due to governmental regional support in all levels of social and cultural life⁶². The Yakut language is spoken by 94% of the Yakut population⁶³. There are many Yakut kindergartens, schools, TV and radio programs, as well as newspapers in the Yakut language.

The main reason the Yakut language is thriving is the autonomy granted to the Republic of Sakha in the Soviet Union allowing for Yakut language to function in all spheres. Moreover, attitudes of ethnic population are positive towards the mother tongue.

For many among the Evenki people Yakut language is either their first or second language. Indigenous languages (Evenki, Even, Yukaghir, Chukchi, Dolgan) are used and maintained at the municipal/village level, even though the percentage of language use is in reality quite low. Evenki language is spoken by 5-10% of its population, Even is spoken by 26%, while Dolgan, Chukchi and Yukaghir are nearly extinct in Sakha⁶⁴.

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 channel⁶⁵. 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 Yakut⁶⁶.

“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” (Informant C)

Multilingualism is one of the reasons for the language shift. One type of bilingualism is when an Evenki child grows up in the taiga with the herd, and his/her first language is

⁶² The Law «About the languages in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) 16 October 1992, №1170-XII, URL: <http://www.sakha.gov.ru/node/41515>

⁶³ Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Sakha (Yakut) URL: <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/sah>

⁶⁴ Ethnologue: Languages of the World: Evenki, Even, Dolgan, Yukaghir URL: <https://www.ethnologue.com/language/evn>, URL: <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/eve>, URL: <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/dlg>, <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/yux>, Online portal of Association of the small-numbered indigenous peoples of Yakutia, published 07.05.2015 <http://yakutiakmns.org/archives/3423>

⁶⁵ URL: http://www.teleguide.info/kanal1646_20141116.html national TV channel «NVK», Online portal of Association of the small-numbered indigenous peoples of Yakutia, published 07.05.2015 <http://yakutiakmns.org/archives/3423>

⁶⁶ Ilken newspaper website URL: <http://yakutiakmns.org/gazeta-ilken>

Evenki and the second is Russian (the language of education). The second type is when an Evenki child knows Evenki from home and receives education in Russian and/or Yakut. And the third type is when an Evenki child speaks Russian and/or Yakut at home and/or in society and learns Evenki at school as a foreign language. English and other foreign languages become the third, fourth and fifth languages for indigenous children. Both regional (where Yakut is the regional official language) and national (Russian is the state official language) multilingualism have contributed to the language shift (Marfusalova, 2009).

Education: human and financial resources

Evenki language has been taught in four universities of the Russian Federation: in Gertsen Pedagogical University (since 1953), North-Eastern Federal University (former Yakut State University since 1989), in Buryat State University and in Khabarovsk Pedagogical University.

Historically, Leningrad (now Saint Petersburg) became the center for the education and training of peoples of the North. Gertsen Pedagogic Institute is the heart of the education of indigenous peoples. According to Grenoble and Whaley (2006), the situation in higher education is contradictory, because indigenous students go to Saint Petersburg to study indigenous languages (their mother tongues) and pedagogy and then they lose their ability to speak their mother tongues fluently.

In an ideal situation teachers should be trained in the environment of the studied indigenous language, allowing indigenous people to perfect their mother tongue in situ (Grenoble and Whaley, 2006). On the other hand, as one of my informants noticed, the multicultural experience of studying at a university with other indigenous students gives one a feeling of common background, common history and even common identity (Informant A). However, the Informant A did admit the lack of experience studying his/her mother tongue in an environment where Evenki is spoken as a first language:

“I do not know where I can speak it (Evenki). To learn it as an oral language I must go to Iengra or Tyanya, where people use it as a first language. One should be in an environment to get used to the language, right?”

North-Eastern Federal University in Yakutsk offers a programme called “Evenki language teacher” at the Institute of Philology. The programme is designed for those students who have a good grasp of Evenki language as a mother tongue or one of the languages of use.

But in some groups there are students who do not speak Evenki. It automatically decreases the efficiency of the programme since there will be Evenki language teachers with a degree but without language fluency. There is a lack of a college level programme where students could take Evenki courses at a beginner's level. In general there are no organized courses for interested population or students.

“The educational base is poor there (the Northern department of the NEFU). Only students who are native speakers can manage to study Evenki from the perspective of pedagogy, to be competent teachers afterwards. For those who study it as a second (third, fourth) language it might be extremely problematic” (Informant H)

Another problem is poorly motivated students in the Northern department (Isakov, 2014). On one hand, those students who have some grasp of the Evenki language might learn it and become qualified and interested teachers. However, there are extremely few graduates who speak Evenki very well. On the other hand, there are some fake (phony) Evenki who pretend to Evenki and obtain “Evenki certificate” and then use it in order to get “indigenous quotas” in higher education.⁶⁷ This phenomenon has emerged at times when exemptions (benefits) were ensured by regional legislation in Yakutia for indigenous people in 2000s. People in Yakutia say that the number of the Evenki has increased in hundreds or even thousands after that regulations were adopted. According to some informants, in case of the Evenki language teacher program, there are some students who are not interested in learning the Evenki language, but “just getting their scholarship” (Informant H). Notably, indigenous students who have an indigenous insert in their passport and are registered in the indigenous compact settlements have the right to apply for “indigenous scholarship”.⁶⁸

Evenki language is taught at ethnic schools in Yakutia in places of traditional settlements of Evenki people and in the capital of the republic, Yakutsk. In theory, it should be taught as a core or a free choice subject and the language of instruction should be Evenki. But in practice, the language of instruction is usually Russian because teachers themselves may not be proficient in Evenki (Grenoble and Whaley, 2006). The lack of human resources is one of the main problems in language planning. However, during fieldwork I have met teachers of the Evenki language in Yakutsk, who are native speakers of Evenki.

⁶⁷ Insert in a passport about belonging to small-numbered indigenous group, see also chapter 1 p.12

⁶⁸ Information about scholarship for indigenous students in North Eastern Federal University <http://www.s-vfu.ru/studentu/stipendiya/sp/>

“Teachers themselves do not speak Evenki fluently. They do not use it (Evenki) during the lecture. We had an Evenki course once a week. It is not enough to learn the language” (Informant A)

Also, Grenoble and Whaley point at problems in educational methodology: “teaching methods have not been adapted to the shift in the knowledge of the language” (Grenoble and Whaley, 2006: 75). 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 (Marfusalova, 2013).

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

Thus, systematized and adapted materials are needed in order to organize successful language teaching. Furthermore, the same informant said that the state fulfills its function by protecting the linguistic rights from a legal point of view, but the indigenous people themselves are lacking the interest and initiative which could make changes in the situation concerning language loss.

As follows from the discussions with my informants and other Evenki, another one of the most difficult obstacles for the Evenki language revitalization is the absence of a standard Evenki version, or a norm that would cut across dialects (Discussions with informants H, G, D, and other Evenki). A practical matter of the problem is “a striking mismatch between some of the published pedagogical materials <...> the standard school bilingual dictionary, <...> on the one hand, and the published Evenki prose and poetry on the other” (Grenoble and Whaley, 2006: 74). In fact, when one tries to learn the language on one's own, it is difficult to catch the pattern of the language, since in different sources there are its different versions. For instance, Nimngakan tales by Nukuchan (my great-grandfather) are written in the Uchur sub-dialect (found in Southern Yakutia). But many dictionaries are based on the western dialect. So if I try to translate and analyze the epos, it is almost like dealing with two different languages. In the net of present circumstances one find oneself challenged to learn the Evenki language due to the absence of the supra-regional dialectical Evenki language which would unite all sources of language – literature, educational materials and language environment.

Though the situation concerning language politics and vitality vary from region to region, the main threads are the same. Thus, Mamontova gives an example of the attitude of teachers and school staff towards Evenki courses in Evenkiya (Krasnoyarskiy Krai).

“Among the main problems of teaching the native language are: low level of education of teachers (university graduates often do not know Evenki language); low salary and program overload with extraneous subjects prevent additional qualified personnel from joining. In high school, academic hours which should be devoted to Evenki classes are often spent in preparation for the Russian language exam. Sometimes, if an Evenki teacher cannot be found, other classes are taught instead, but in the timetable it will be entered as “Evenki language” (Mamontova, 2013: 72).

In the 2000s, the Government of Yakutia adopted a program for indigenous children to learn their native languages. According to the International Child Development Centre, in the 1999/2000 academic year, 48% of Even children, 25% of Evenki children and 81% of Yukaghir children have been taught their native language⁶⁹. Currently, Evenki language is taught in 12 schools among 30 ethnic schools, whereas there are 79 “indigenous villages” in Yakutia. In the regional budget of the Republic Sakha 65 million rubles are allocated in the period from 2012 to 2016 for ethnic school financing⁷⁰. Compared to the previous situation in the 1990s, there are positive changes from legal perspectives. But in practice, the dramatic decline in language use is registered by the national census. In spite of all the legal rights secured by the state of Russia and regional legislation, the most systematic and prominent help for indigenous education in Yakutia comes from UNESCO. For instance, the project “Teachers of the Arctic” is the main foundation for a culturally appropriate education of the indigenous people in Yakutia⁷¹.

4.2 DISCUSSIONS ON ETHNIC IDENTITY AND LANGUAGE

According to Harrison (2007), a linguist and author of “When languages die”, indigenous languages are better preserved in those communities which continue their traditional way of life. This theory is based on the idea that natural conditions of language functioning are better preserved in the areas where a traditional way of life is kept. According

⁶⁹ Department of peoples affairs and federative relations archive
<http://archiv.council.gov.ru/files/journalsf/item/20090923151430.pdf>

⁷⁰ Around 2 million USD

⁷¹ UNESCO projects with Yakutia http://www.unesco.mid.ru/old/pr_e_77.html

to this approach, one can achieve success in language preservation while revitalizing traditional economy. This idea was further adopted by “ethnic” leaders who have an influence on ethnic policies and development of educational programmes in Russia. Thus nomadic schools have become trendy in the Russian North.

Harrison’s discussions are based on the theory of language ecology developed by Haugen. Haugen (1971) argues that language ecology is “the study of interactions between any given language and its environment”. Ecology in this field is understood as environment where language lives own life in society. When the language is spoken by society, it lives; it has environment and therefore, ecology. Once the great Evenki poet Alitet Nemtushkin stated at a congress in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia):

“...он эвэнкил нонон бингкитын, тыкэ-дэт бил-дэ нада. Эвэнкил эрэгэр орон дагадун бингкитын. Орон ачин одянган – эвэнки ачин одянган” («...one should start living as Evenki lived before. Evenki have always been living with reindeer. No reindeer - no Evenki») (Mamontova, 2008: 5)

There are very few villages in Yakutia where the Evenki language is used in everyday life. Most of these villages are populated almost exclusively by Evenki who drive reindeer herds. Informant B is from one of those villages and this is what she said about the Evenki language vitality:

“I think in Iengra (Evenki village in Southern Yakutia) Evenki culture and language is preserved because of compact population, 80% of the population is Evenki. In fact, villagers do not speak Evenki, but «taezhniki» (herders) do speak. Their children speak Evenki”

The same situation was explained by Informant I:

“Evenki language is vital where people live far away from cities, they have reindeer, they hunt and use the Evenki language as a first language of communication. I think it is because language lives where it is needed”

Based on what has been discussed, in the present situation the statement of Alitet Nemtushkin about the vitality of the Evenki language seems to be topical. On one hand, Evenki who have herds and live as their ancestors lived, currently use the Evenki language in their daily life. This underpins the theory of language ecology and discussion of Harrison.

On the other hand, aforementioned adaptation of the theory of language ecology excludes the indigenous people who do not live in traditional areas, and particularly the

Evenki who do not deal with reindeer husbandry (traditional activity of Evenki). Remembering that not so many Evenki currently are occupied in traditional economy, one can see how many Evenki are not considered as ones who can revitalize their language in non-traditional environment. Furthermore, some of the Evenki of Generation Hope have been born into urban environments and have never seen a reindeer or been to the taiga. Nevertheless, due to an identity awakening they have realized their Evenkiness and are now willing to learn their mother tongue.

Thus, the language ecology theory in its interpretation by Harrison (2007) cannot fully describe the Evenki situation, especially the urbanized Evenki. However, this theory might be understood from another perspective. If we see “ecology” as an environment, language ecology turns out to be the language environment. In this case, language is best preserved if there is an environment to use it. In practice, there is no environment for the Evenki language because territorial autonomy within Russian Federation is not granted for Evenki⁷², nor do they have any functioning pan-Evenki representative body⁷³. In the light of Haugen’s discussions, Evenki language revitalization perspectives are not very promising. Indigenous languages are unique in the sense of their position in the multilingual conditions of nation-states. One cannot find an easy answer for a universal solution for indigenous languages revival program. Moreover, the theory of language ecology does not consider the phenomenon of the new indigenous identities which might create somewhat artificial language ecology (environment) in order to revitalize mother tongue.

Stephen May, a Professor in School of Maori Education, discusses the links between language and identity from different angles. First, some sociolinguists see language as a contingent factor of one’s identity. In other words, if a language shift happens, it would affect only the language use aspect of one’s ethnic identity (May, 2005). In the case of Evenki, this point of view is partly contradictory. As the language shift happened for the Stolen Generation, the Lost Generation will have their language aspect of ethnic identity tampered with, considering that the language they learned at home was not their mother tongue. If parents had not ensured their child’s awareness of his/her own ethnic identity, the child would identify with the language s/he speaks.

Another point of view is a language choice based on costs and benefits. In other words, “individuals make their rational choices about their ethnic alignments solely on the

⁷² Except former Evenkiya (Evenkiskiy Autonomous Okrug) where autonomy was granted since 1930s, but currently it is a part of Krasnoyarskiy Krai

⁷³ For instance, Sami Parliament is a representative body for Sami people

basis of the social and material gain it will bring them” (May, 2005: 328). May refers to Banton assuming that “an individual will join in ethnic group mobilization only when he expects the benefits of her/his participation to exceed the costs” (1987 cited May, 2005: 328). A language shift explained by costs/opportunities is illustrated by the decision of those Evenki parents who intentionally chose a language other than their mother tongue to communicate with their children.

“Parents also shared widespread public fears that the increase in the number of teaching hours for the Evenki language will adversely affect the <pupils’ > level of knowledge of the Russian language. The latter is due to the desire of parents to ensure their children’s successful professional future” (Mamontova, 2013: 72)

On one hand, presently we see the examples of attempts of Evenki who experience the awakening of Evenkiness, to revitalize their mother tongue. Parents who feel the responsibility for their own mother tongue create possibilities for children to hear the language. The number of those who take care of a child’s awareness of the mother tongue is quite small. One of the informants is a teacher of the Evenki language. She has shared her own thoughts of Evenki parents’ attitude towards education and the Evenki language situation:

“A teacher should wake the interest of pupils to the language; for instance, I use folklore during the class. Small pupils have a greater interest, they love to sing and dance using the Evenki language. Parents of the children I teach are not interested in the Evenki language, though I tried to draw their attention to that question. Fortunately, there are the Evenki who care about their future, but their children are going to other schools” (Informant J)

On the other hand, the paucity of environment and contexts for the Evenki language use automatically limits its value as a language of “opportunities”. A proficiency in the Evenki language does not give one an advantage at the job market, or at higher education’s institutions. Practically, there is no environment for the language to be used. This demotivates both parents and children to learn the Evenki language. Applying Banton’s theory of rational choices, one may conclude that the costs of the Evenki learning tend to prevail over the opportunities to be opened by its use. Thus, some of the Evenki decide not to pay attention to, and never think of learning and using, their mother tongue.

The examples of parents who teach their children Evenki language by own efforts are currently presenting an exception from the “benefits and costs” rule. Due to the lack of courses at the university or elsewhere, people organize courses on their own. For instance,

Evenki activists in Yakutsk organized courses not only for adults but also for their children. Children, whose parents show them the importance of their mother tongue, are interested too. Moreover, it creates working places for teachers. Individuals' efforts demonstrate that language revitalization on an individual level is feasible.

Interestingly, the Population Census data shows following numbers: 4,310 Evenki speakers were registered in 2010 in Russia; 4,802 Evenki claimed to be the Evenki language their mother tongue (Kazakevich, 2015). Apparently, the ethnic revitalization is illustrated by these numbers. According to Kazakevich, it is a recent phenomenon in the Evenki language case. To be honest, I refer myself to this category of Evenki who are not native speakers, but perceive the Evenki language their mother tongue or "ancestral" tongue.

4.3 ATTITUDES AND INDIVIDUALS' EFFORTS. HOW EVENKINESS LEADS PEOPLE TO LANGUAGE REVIVAL

Currently there is no functioning well-structured and planned programme of the Evenki language revitalization in Yakutia. Partial efforts such as nomadic schools and "ethnic schools" are hampered by the lack of financial and human resources and inappropriate teaching materials. Furthermore, the roles of federal, regional and local authorities are mixed, and even though responsibilities are divided clearly on paper, in reality it is a difficult task to find out who is responsible for what.

As has already been mentioned, the role of individuals in language revitalization is crucial. In Chapter 3, the awakening of Evenkiness was discussed as an Evenki identity renaissance. The language component of an identity is often fundamental. Through the language one may feel as if they are representative of an ethnic group, by expressing one's feelings by means of their mother tongue. One can identify oneself with one's own ancestors, read literature and folklore, and gain historical knowledge and awareness about one's own culture and ethnic group.

A famous Evenki writer, Galina Varlamova "Keptuke", described the process of awakening of Evenkiness for the new generation:

"Historical genetic memory is a very strong thing... hundreds of years must go by for ethnic orientations of the person to be erased. Young people's Evenkiness is now «awakening» because they have their Evenki ancestors" (discussion with Galina Ivanovna Keptuke, March 2015)

During my fieldwork I have met many young people who are interested in the Evenki language. They are motivated to learn it and make it the primary language of their communication. According to them, many trends have arisen the last decade. First, an “indigenous” fashion - ethnic styled wear/clothes has become a new trend. Secondly, new ways of the expressing Evenkiness are being exhibited by young Evenki singers and, for instance, an Evenki animator.

“Popularization in the sense, for example, when the youth of the Iengra began to record tracks in Evenki, it became very popular, immediately it got trendy and cool to speak Evenki. In order to preserve the language, there should be a fashion for a language” (Informant B)

Secondly, the Evenki language has come to film. A young man from an Evenki village has produced an animated film in Evenki based on the epos written my great-grandfather (“Irkismondya the hero”). The film was awarded a special prize in Moscow at the scientific conference “Step into the future”. An Evenki folk band Girkilen is going to perform a city scene a part of the Irkismondya epos tale at the end of 2015.

“It will be our contribution to the 100-year anniversary of Nikolay Trofimov, the great Nimngakan tale-singer. We will present it in Evenki and we hope it will be a great performance” (leader of the Evenki folk band «Girkilen»)

Finally, in the social media the Evenkiness and the Evenki language have become popular topics. In the social network vk.com, there is an Evenki group which is now the main platform for the Evenki language use⁷⁴. Language revitalization activists and other interested people are communicating in Evenki and find supporters there. Due to this group, around 3000 people from all over Russia are united and share their experience and even learn the Evenki language. When I talk to one of the language activists, the “Evenki” group moderator, I use Evenki language. It gives me hope to see that our language is alive and we will keep using it, though I am not proficient in my mother tongue.

“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” (Informant C)

⁷⁴ Evenki online group in V Kontakte social network <https://vk.com/evenkil>

The websites evengus.ru and evenkiteka.ru, created by Rustam Yusupov, should also be mentioned. Yusupov was living in Irkutsk when he learned about the culture and history of the Evenki. He has taught himself the Evenki language and was the first to digitalize the dictionaries of Boldyrev (a linguist at the Institute of Philology of the Siberian Department of Russian Academy of Sciences). Yusupov has made a significant contribution to the development of means of communication in Evenki language:

“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), wish each other a good morning - «аяттыманим» (ayattymanit), good day - «аяттырганим» («ayattyrganit»), goodnight - «аятдолбоним» («ayatdolbonit») or «аятайкаллу» (ayataykallu), congratulate each other a Happy Birthday - «балдынасинэнгидис» (baldynasinengidis) ... Participants have learned these expressions. Those who want to explore <the language> deeper, ask a native speakers. There is a group of activists who corresponds mainly in their native language - Evenki, Even. This is one way to learn the language. Now a version of the Russian-Evenki dictionary and tutorials for smartphones in android have been created” (cited Isakov, 2014)

The sites evengus.ru and evenkiteka.ru keep a digitalized Evenki library for self-learners. They are user-friendly and free for those who want to learn Evenki language and read literature about and in Evenki. According to the administration of the evengus.ru, around thousand users visit the website daily. Moreover, there is a “teach-yourself” app, created by Galina and Aleksandr Varlamovs for those who learn Evenki as a foreign language. *Evedituren (Evenki language)* is a free application with a voiced phrasebook and self-teacher. I personally use it as a beginning Evenki speaker.

In order to find a tailor for my national Evenki dress I went to an atelier (studio) specializing in ethnic costumes. While discussing the details, I learned about language activists who organize Evenki language courses every weekend at the atelier. The teacher is a student at the Northern Department of the Philological Faculty at NEFU. While discussing the Evenki language revival perspectives at ethnic schools in the villages, she touched upon the following:

“When one good teacher was working at our school, children were keen on Evenki language. They wanted to speak every day; they encouraged their parents to remember what they have forgotten. But good workers often get another job, not least due to tensions within the work group. Then another teacher came, a relative of the head, and children have lost their interest

towards language. I personally do not want to go work there. I would rather try another village” (Informant I)

All the above-mentioned efforts have been made by individuals interested in the Evenki language. Most of them have no financial support from the state. Their individuals’ attitudes towards their mother tongue have now become the main driving force of the Evenki language revitalization. The new Evenkiness⁷⁵ currently tends to make people learn the language, in order to make it vital at least at home and in communication among like-minded individuals. If we take into account the example of Hebrew, which was a ritual language, not an oral mother tongue, but has been revived by Jewish activists, we can say that languages can be revitalized by individual efforts (Rubunstein, 1980).

Anderson’s theory of “imagined communities” introduces an alternative way of minorities’ language development in the modern world in multiethnic societies (Anderson, 2006). Some languages are being left out due to little or no functioning environment and due to the emergence of majorities’ “instrumental” languages which bear more functions in societies. More often these majorities’ languages open more economic and social opportunities than the minorities’ ones. Therefore, people make their rational choices according to specific situations. In the case of indigenous languages, they are often of almost no use anymore and people tend to admit and accept that:

“- Mira, I am proud of you that you do your master thesis about our people, about us. But I do not believe that there is a point in it, in learning the language. However, we have never talked of it earlier. Now people talk, they discuss and they act... - I do not agree with you, grandma, I think if we think of it, if we talk and we act, our language will have its own place in our lives. No matter where, it will” (talk with my grandmother)

I personally do believe that people now have the strength to decide and to make language revitalization feasible. Anderson (2006) suggests ethnic groups who have no or little space for their languages to be used in present communities (society, work place, etc.) can create a society where these languages can function. Language, according to Anderson, has a capacity to generate imagined communities. Apparently, this is the function of the Evenki language now - to create communities, to unite people and make them help each other to find ways towards the language revitalization. The efforts of the Evenki people and those who want the Evenki language to live on are an attempt to create imagined community. Thus, an artificial language environment, which has been mentioned earlier, might be a solution for the

⁷⁵ Or awakened interest for Evenki language and culture, in the case of Yusupov

Evenki language to survive within an imagined community. I think there is a real opportunity for indigenous languages to be preserved especially considering awakening ethnic identities which currently plays a big role in uniting and solidarity. Thus, the Evenkiness can also be preserved.

At the conference “Indigenous Barents 2050: Impacts of our footprints”, Pavel Sulyandziga has stated the following about the collaboration and coexistence of indigenous people and the states:

“There are two keys: one key is in the hands of indigenous people, the second one is taken by the state. If one key does not work, the whole mechanism is not going to work”

Indigenous people’s attitude towards their own rights and future as a distinct ethnic group must influence national and regional politics. However, it should be highlighted that linguistic rights, while secured by legal documents have almost no reflection on reality, as discussed earlier. This is well illustrated by the experience of one of my informants who was looking for a job as an Evenki language teacher after her graduation from the Northern department at the NEFU:

“For months, I was desperate and did not know what to do. I wanted to teach children Evenki, but I had no place to do my work. Everywhere we hear that «problems of the indigenous peoples must be solved, languages must be taught and learnt» but in reality it is just ignored, if I struggled so much to get a job as a teacher, what shall we think of programs of revitalization?” (Informant J)

The informant has found a job when she learned about an ethnic school in Yakutsk. She found like-minded people and she is now among the activists who encourage and inspire people to learn the Evenki language. The situation she describes is quite common in Yakutia, although the problems of indigenous people are discussed at each and every relevant Congress and the topic of indigenous languages loss is heard loud and clear. The lack of systematized programme of the Evenki language revitalization and the low motivation of Evenki themselves are the main reasons for the language loss, says Andrei Isakov (2014). In fact, the examples I have given here are among the positive ones. I have talked to approximately twenty people who have hope and see the future of their (our) language as bright. But there are other 38,000 Evenki who might not think of the Evenki language as their mother tongue or a language which can be and will be revitalized due to plenty of reasons

4.4 SUMMARY

In this chapter the present situation concerning the Evenki language was discussed from different angles. First of all, the legal and socio-economic variables regarding the Evenki language possible revitalization were clarified. It became clear that linguistic rights of indigenous people are guaranteed both in federal and regional level in Russian Federation. In Yakutia, indigenous languages are given official status and the Republic's constitutional obligation is to protect them while giving indigenous people the right to preserve own native speech.

However, the feasibility to implement the right to preserve and revitalize mother tongues is doubted due to complexity of the situation in which indigenous languages are found. Indigenous languages in Yakutia are left with no context to be used, not least because of negative attitudes of indigenous peoples themselves. The question set in this chapter was whether or not new Evenkiness affects the Evenki peoples' attitudes towards their mother tongue. Based on what has been discussed with use of several theories, I would assume that new Evenkiness is creating solidarity among Evenki people. The present situation concerning the Evenki language leads people to feel the responsibility towards their mother tongue. According to most of my informants, peoples' attitudes are changing and language becomes sort of a symbol of ethnic identity. Informant H shared her thoughts about a reverse in attitude towards her own ethnic identity and mother tongue:

*“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” (Informant I)*

This reflection illustrates the shift from shame to pride in speaking one's indigenous mother tongue and furthermore, the shame of not being able to speak Evenki. Evenki people, as well as other indigenous people in Russia are talking about the awakening of their ethnic identities and their interest in their own cultures and languages. The interest towards a mother tongue also unites people and makes people feel the need in the common platform to learn mother tongue with like-minded people. In the net of circumstances currently indigenous languages in Yakutia might be revitalized only by mutual efforts of individuals, most probably in the artificial language environment and in “imagined communities”

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have explored the ethnic identity formation of the Evenki people in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) and its role in the Evenki language revitalization. I discussed the relevant background information within specific theoretical frameworks in order to understand the factors, which have contributed to the ethnic identity revitalization process of the Evenki people in Yakutia and the ongoing situation with Evenki language use. The main findings regarding the new Evenkiness phenomenon, as well as the Evenki language revitalization attempts both by the state authorities and Evenki individuals are summed up below.

5.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My goal of this study was to explore the role of the new Evenkiness in the Evenki language revitalization in Yakutia. Regarding the first research question, the factors which informed the new Evenkiness formation, we have seen several hypotheses of a different nature which seem have accounted for fruitful environment for Evenki ethnic identity revitalization.

First, the primordial theory treating of ethnicity as a given resilient phenomenon allows us to see the awakening of the Evenkiness among the youth as a natural mechanism wound up at a moment in time that is critical for the Evenki ethnos. Here I would highlight that Evenkiness is a family transmitted knowledge, which had resisted colonization and assimilation. Moreover, Evenkiness when given to a person through genes from his/her ancestors or acquired due to different reasons, becomes a driving force in a period crucial for ethnic group.

Second, the ethnic identity of indigenous people in USSR was politically regulated by assimilation policies, and “ethnos” and “ethnicity” were almost tabooed. However, in the post-1991 Russian Federation the relative freedom for expression of one’s own identity has opened new ways and space for ethnicity to be awakened and revitalized. The new generation

born in the late 1980s and early 1990s are the representatives of Generation Hope who speak of their own ethnic identity paying less attention to former ethnos-related taboos than their parents and grandparents.

Third, globalization and the growing interconnectedness of indigenous peoples all around the world contribute to a pan-indigenous identity development. Particularly, it helps indigenous populations in countries like Russia, where the majority's awareness about indigenous people is quite low, to realize the value of their own culture and ethnic identity. Connection and collaboration over the indigenous issues with other indigenous peoples empower small-numbered indigenous people of Russia. The global indigenous movements, the development of indigenous academia, and the acceptance of the indigenous methodologies, as well as traditional indigenous knowledge also contribute towards the increase of the level of self-awareness and self-esteem of indigenous peoples. Thus, ethnic revitalization emerges among youth and other generations of the Evenki people.

When it comes to the theoretical framework in which the first research question was discussed, the discussions of Eidheim and Olsen are quite suitable for the case study of the Evenki in Yakutia. As has been highlighted, the history and experience of the Sami people in Norway and the Evenki in Russia are quite the similar. In particular, Eidheim illustrates the reality in which the Sami ethnic identity had become a social stigma within the society consisting of two ethnic groups - indigenous and non-indigenous. The Evenki had experienced something similar during the Soviet Union. However, Olsen's discussions of ethnic identity as a private matter is rather less suitable to the Evenki case since the ethnic identity of the Evenki in Yakutia has apparently not reached its independence from the existing society level. Nevertheless, the new Evenkiness is becoming a substitute for the phase of ethnic identity as a private matter. Notably, the new Evenki identity, according to discussions with some of the informants, is the fruit of several factors, which underpins the hypothesis that ethnicity is both "primordial and instrumental," (Berghe 1995:360 in Bacik 2002). Moreover, ethnic identity is not a fixed phenomenon, but dynamic and adjustive.

The second research question addresses the role of the new Evenkiness in Evenki language revitalization. The responsibility over endangered languages must be taken by both the state and the people who consider those languages to be their mother tongues. The current situation in Russia has quite a limited space to offer to the use of indigenous languages, unless the indigenous language is an official regional language of a regional autonomy. Furthermore, the economic situation in regions makes authorities prioritize expenditures. However, Yakutia is considered to be the most successful part of the RF in the implementation of "indigenous"

laws and education. Nevertheless, the initiative of the indigenous peoples themselves is crucial for indigenous languages' revival.

Attitude is what makes things valuable for one or another person. If a mother tongue is valuable for a person, s/he will think of it as an important component of her/his life and, not least, ethnic identity. Another point is the language context, or in other words, a language environment where a person can use mother tongue and feel a shared significance of the language with those who also speak it. Many indigenous languages are unfortunately being ousted by majorities' languages, or state (regional) languages. In some cases, they are left with no environment to be spoken other than traditional. The traditional environment for the Evenki languages is for instance, reindeer herds.

I personally think of the Evenki language as a language that is very important for me. I want to speak it and I do understand that in order to become fluent I will have to go to the areas where it is spoken as a first language, most probably to the taiga. But on the other hand, there should be another way for the language to survive. According to Anna Kazakevich, a linguist from Moscow State University at the Evenki conference in Vilnius, May 2015 "the Evenki language is not a "reindeer herding" language or language only for hunting, one can discuss anything in Evenki". So, we can think of another environment for the Evenki language to be used in, for instance, artificial. Many of Evenki youth are now learning their mother tongue via the Internet, mobile and PC applications and websites, as mentioned in Chapter 4. The most sufficient language environment currently is the "Evenki" group in the social network vk.com, where members are united by one goal - to share experiences and to find like-minded people to learn the language. Our language lives there.

When it comes to theoretical explanations of the attempts to revitalize the Evenki language we have seen how the theory of imagined communities explains the phenomenon of the new Evenkiness which makes the Evenki increase their interest towards own language. For instance, the online "Evenki" group is an example of "an imagined community". When an outnumbered ethnic group is left out with almost no language, but an awakened ethnic identity, it is possible that those who are active in their "revitalizationist" initiatives will take the responsibility for building an imagined community. I personally know several people who are constructing such communities and hopefully, they will find success.

Every human being is expected to make her/his own choices based on the potential costs and benefits the decision might bear. Nevertheless, the choice of the dominant language in a multilingual society is made by the state. The state's language becomes the only way to gain access to education, the job markets, and the mainstream society. In the mixed

federations, like the RF, there are some possibilities elevate a minority language a regional status. For instance, Yakut is currently spoken by 90% of its ethnic population due to it being the official regional language in Yakutia, as well as positive attitudes of Yakut people towards their mother tongue.

In Yakutia, indigenous languages are restricted to the function of a “local” or “village” language, even though in most villages Yakut has become the first language for most Evenki. Thus, the benefits of studying the Evenki language are quite limited. Basically, almost the only way to be employed with the Evenki language is to become a teacher. However, Evenki language teachers are badly needed both in villages and in cities. If we try to understand why some people try to learn their native tongue if there are almost no benefits unless they are not going to be language teachers, we may see the links between the endangered language and the awakening ethnic identity. The desire to revitalize the Evenki language and transfer it to their children makes people ignore the costs and organize Evenki courses and study their own culture. Another question is: what can be done in order to revitalize the Evenki language?

5.2 WHAT CAN BE DONE? A PRACTICAL DISCUSSION

The State

Coming back to the discussion about the state’s role in the revitalization of endangered languages, we must remember the peculiarities of the state of Russia. The Russian Federation is a very large country consisting of 85 subunits, each with its own history, ethnic population, and administrative status. Constitutionally, the state of Russia guarantees the rights of small-numbered indigenous people to preserve and maintain their distinct culture and language. Moreover, some subunits of the Russian Federation are also protecting indigenous peoples’ rights by regional laws. The Republic of Sakha is among those subjects of the RF which support indigenous peoples both legally and financially. Furthermore, the Government of Yakutia collaborates with UNESCO regarding indigenous peoples’ education. Several informants have shared their ambivalent feelings concerning the role of the state and people themselves in the language revitalization process. Informant I asserts:

“The State does its function: it allows us to ask for support, protects our rights for education and give us an access to our mother tongue. I think we Evenki sometimes do not take a chance to better the situation, to make an effort to revitalize our mother tongue.”

This statement makes me think of the peoples' role and desire to change the situation. On papers, small-numbered indigenous peoples' rights are secured and guaranteed by Russian law, while in practice they themselves do not fully exercise these rights. Another point is the real possibility to use one's right for education in one's mother tongue. Article 14 of the Federal Law "About Education" stated:

*"Citizens of the Russian Federation shall have the right to receive ... education in their native language... as well as the right to study their native language... **within the possibilities offered by the educational system.**"⁷⁶*

Russian standardized education offers not so many opportunities for the education in mother tongue for small-numbered indigenous people in Yakutia, though Yakutia is considered as the most successful region of Russia concerning "indigenous" education.

Education

An endangered language, if considered to be revitalized by the state, should have a revitalization programme designed for a specific complex of external and internal conditions it exists in. The Evenki language has not acquired such a programme yet, unless we perceive "indigenous" schools as part of such a programme. However, if there is a possibility for a revitalization programme for the Evenki language, the state must involve indigenous people as much as possible. As has been discussed in previous chapters, the little participation of indigenous people in decision-making concerning language issues, policies, and education has diminished their benefit. Moreover, it played a big disservice particularly in the case of the establishing the literary Evenki language.

The main challenge for teachers of the Evenki language is the absence of appropriate teaching materials. Therefore, in order to improve teaching process, materials must be updated with regard to the ongoing language shift and, if possible, with a consideration of the dialects in particular regions. It might facilitate learning and increase willingness to learn one's own dialect of the Evenki language. Notably, the ethnic component of the language learning is a very popular among Evenki teachers. They say that pupils are interested in Evenki songs, poetry and culture. So, ethnic revitalization might also attract pupils' attention to learning their mother tongue.

When it comes to higher education, there are three key points: first, the admission of Evenki language teachers to higher education, second, the mandatory training for teachers to

⁷⁶ Federal Law №273-FZ «About education» 29.12.2012
http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_173649/

go through; and finally, the motivation of both teachers and students. The comprehensive knowledge of the Evenki language is obligatory for those who apply for specialization as Evenki language teacher, since teaching materials are designed for the students with a good grasp of the language. However, there are many students on the Evenki teachers' courses who have never heard the Evenki language. Thus, either the admission criteria of basic language knowledge must be introduced, or there should be a college programme for the Evenki language beginner level which would allow students to prepare before they study language professionally. This is crucial for the Evenki language in general, because teachers are the ones who take practical responsibility for the future of endangered languages. A well-organized educational process is the main condition for students to become successful in their profession. However, Informant I shared her worries about the training her group is going to have next semester:

“I will be sent to a «Russian» school, where only ethnic Russians study. But I have no idea what I will teach them as a teacher of the Evenki language. It seems pointless for me, actually, it would be much more productive and useful if I go teach to a school with the Evenki language course.”

As mentioned in chapter four, low motivation of the students plays negative role in the results of the educational programme in general. I think motivation should come both from students and teachers as well as the programme itself. As Informant A stated, during her whole education in bachelor and master programmes she has never been on a field trip to an area where the Evenki language is spoken by native speakers even though, half of the Evenki live in Yakutsk, where the North Eastern Federal University is located, so one can now easily find native speakers nearby. On the other hand, the students who just arrived to city centre from remote regions would hardly be able to establish contacts with indigenous communities in Yakutsk very fast. Therefore, the role of such educational programmes is very important. During a discussion with an indigenous person from Yakutia working in the North Eastern Federal University, I was challenged to answer one question:

“Mira, how are you going to revitalize the Evenki language? I always knew the attitude of professors in the Northern Department. They (the Evenki language professors) just give exercises and books in the class and then go. Students do nothing, because they are not given a proper study, and then everyone asks why students cannot speak the language after the graduation!”

Unfortunately, the picture concerning Evenki education is not so promising. Practicalities must be taken under control of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Sakha, the University administration, the Northern Department, professors and students themselves.

5.3 REFLECTIONS

Everything has two sides, everyone is free to see what s/he wants. Those who believe the Evenki language will die out might be right. Those who have their hope will infect other Evenki with their belief and Evenkiness. Ethnic revitalization is possible, we see it in everyday life, and we read books about how people revitalized their identity and mother tongue. Maybe the future will be much brighter than we expect. In order to achieve a brighter future we must maintain and revive our Evenkiness, we ought to believe in ourselves. My great-grandfather, working hard every day as a reindeer herder in kolkhoz and overcoming a serious illness, told my great-grandmother: "I am doing that (writing down the Evenki epos) for you and for our children, for you to live a better life". I think he felt a personal responsibility for his own people, he knew his mission was to save the Evenki epos, created by ancient Evenki and transferred from generation to generation. It is hard to imagine what we would do without our heritage recorded and published in books. For me my great-grandfather Nukuchan will always be an example of brave and selfless Evenki.

"When you lose your language <...> you exclude yourself from the past" (Van Hoorde, 1998: 8). I personally felt this, being isolated from my own roots, my history and my past. When the natural cycle of passing of language and history is broken, we almost lose our ethnic identity. Fortunately, I could witness the way of being Evenki in childhood. I saw how my family members expressed themselves through sayings, habits, customs, beliefs and relationships. So I know what it is to be an Evenki. It is to respect nature, to help people if they need help, to see invisible signs in the forest, to pray for the soul of a hunted animal, to try not to harm even a fly, to help elders and many other things that make me feel Evenki. I feel pain realizing how much we have lost, but at the same time I am happy that I write this paper, so that my children will know who they are and how their ancestors lived. I am grateful that my children will hear the Evenki language and will hopefully learn it. I do believe that these thoughts did not come to me just because I read some books or saw brilliant examples of revitalization of other indigenous cultures and languages, but I think it was meant to be that I would contribute with my thesis a little particle to the great mission of Generation Hope.

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диктовку сказание "Иркисмонде-богатырь". Ему было непривычно диктовать то, что должно было петься. А нимнгакан почти весь состоит из песен действующих лиц. В нем поют все: богатыри, верховые олени, кони, птицы, рыбы и даже деревья.

Он сидел, закрыв глаза, и диктовал текст сказания. В конце первого дня работы он, глядя на меня жалеющими глазами, сказал: "Когда закончишь писать все, ведь сказание очень длинное (на это потребуется время езды на оленях не на одну тысячу кочевков), руки могут онеметь". Несмотря на это, мы в тот раз записали одну треть нимнгакана. В последний день работы он предложил: "Я немного умею писать, в молодости учился читать в ликбезе. Попробую дописать сам то, что не успели". Я оставила ему общие тетради. Прошло время, осенью я по почте получила две общие тетради с записью оставшейся части сказания "Иркисмонде сонинг". Писал он вполне грамотно, смешивая русские и латинские буквы. Даже над долгими гласными ставил знак долготы, копиро-

ЗВОНКОГОЛОСЫЙ СЫН ТАЙГИ

В 1915 году в верховьях Учюра в семье **Звенка** из рода Бута Гермогена Трофимовича родился мальчик. В детстве он ничем не **отличился** от своих сверстников, был тихим, немногословным, но трудолюбивым и проворным. Как все дети тайги, Николай рано научился всем премудростям нелегкой кочевой жизни — выслеживать зверя, метко стрелять, пасти оленей, кочевать, ставить **чум**.

Когда ему шел 10-й год, к ним приехал их амурский сородич — сказитель Семей Заболоцкий, который мастерски исполнял эвенкийские героические сказания — нимнгаканы. И Нюкучан (так звучит имя Николай по-эвенкийски) впервые в жизни несколько вечеров подряд вместе со взрослыми **внимательно** слушал нимнгакан об удивительных богатырских битвах, о чудесных неведомых странах, где растут вечнозеленые травы, неувядающие цветы, исполинские деревья. Где раскинулись долины с тучными стадами, реки и горы с бесчисленными оленями. Где живут неопишуемой красоты девушки, добрые, мудрые старики и сильные, храбрые богатыри, защищающие свое племя от непрощенных злых пришельцев Нижнего мира. Причудливые, фантастически красочные описания всего, о чем говорилось и пелось в нимнгакане, очаровали впечатлительного мальчика. По его словам, он, слушая сказание, весь превращался "в одни глаза и уши", сидел, боясь пошевелиться, чтобы не исчезло сказочное видение. Он впитывал в себя все, что слышал, и душа его ликовала, пела, вторя сказителю. Так он вошел в волшебный мир эвенкийских нимнгаканов и до последних дней своей недолгой жизни носил его в своей доброй, талантливой душе.

вал все мои приемы скорописи — настоято он был наблюдательным, талантливым человеком. Ведь я не учила его, как писать, чтобы экономить время и бумагу. Таким образом он передал еще три сказания из своего репертуара. Сказание "Торгандун Средней земли" подготовлено к публикации. Эвенкийский текст без перевода на русский и научного аппарата составляет 300 страниц машинописи. Это самое большое по объему эвенкийское сказание. Последнее сказание он записывал до приступа болезни зимой в тайге. В тяжелом состоянии его санрейсом привезли в Алдан, требовалась срочная операция. После наркоза он не пришел в себя и скончался на операционном столе. Последнюю неоконченную запись я получила уже после его смерти. И в память о талантливом, самоотверженном сказителе Н.Г. Трофимове этот нимнгакан вместе с другим сказанием "Ихардан-дэвэрдэн тэтылкан дэгийлтар сонгку Дэвэлчэн" помещен в первом томе эвенкийского фольклора 60-томной серии "Памятники фольклора народов Сибири и Дальнего Востока", который издается в Новосибирске. Звонкоголосый сын эвенкийского народа Николай Трофимов первым проторил широкую дорогу всем другим народам Сибири и Дальнего Востока — первый том с его нимнгаканами под названием "Эвенкийские героические сказания" вышел в 1990 году первым из 60-томной серии, имеющей мировое значение. И пусть эта дорога не зарастет и останется на века. Пусть по ней соплеменники знаменитого певца-сказителя, переступив порог XXI века, преодолев все трудности настоящей жизни, уверенно идут к благополучной жизни, воспетой в нимнгаканах. Да поможет им в этом

90лет - эвенкийскому сказителю Трофимову Николаю Гермогеновичу (1915-1971 гг.)

Трофимов Николай Гермогенович родился в семье потомственного охотника Гермогена Ильича из древнего эвенкийского рода Бута, в Учурском районе (ныне Алданском). Семья кочевала в верховьях р. Учура (приток р. Алдана). В семье было двенадцать детей, он был самым младшим; один из братьев Василий Гермогенович погиб в Великой Отечественной войне 1941-45 гг. Супруга сказителя Прасковья Петровна Трофимова проживает в г. Алдане у старшей дочери Татьяны.

В детстве Николай, как и все дети эвенков, рано научился пасти оленей, охотиться на зверя, помогать ставить чум, кочевать. Но его отличала от сверстников тяга к рассказам своих предков. В десятилетнем возрасте, он впервые услышал эвенкийские героические сказания - нимнгакан. Его исполнил первый учитель будущего сказителя - амурский эвенк Семен Васильевич Заболотский (из рода Бута), от него на всю жизнь запомнил старинный нимнгакан (сказание) про Иркисмондя - богатыря. И уже через год пересказывал все подвиги Иркисмондя - богатыря своим сверстникам. Затем усвоил сказания от А. Колесова (из рода Бута) и от своего старшего брата Егора Трофимова в 13 лет. Он пел их долгими зимними вечерами родителям и родственникам, с которыми в то время кочевал и охотился в верховьях Учура. Стариков поражала точность изложения сказания. Когда собирались в стойбище, охотники просили спеть древнее сказание. Исполнение продолжалось семь дней, тогда ему было 14 лет.

Талантливый сказитель своим пением передавал содержание сказания, и его звонкий голос очаровывал слушателей. Слушающие сказания всю ночь, окунаясь в завораживающий мир древности: в мир духов и богатырей, в мир споров борьбы добра и зла. Он не просто излагал содержание, а всеми средствами: пением, различными жестами, выразительной мимикой - изображал каждого действующего лица и богатыря и оленя и зверя и др.



антурского оленя и богатыря, в оленя, и пшавы и др.

В 50-е годы Н.Г. Трофимов переехал в с. Кутана, жители которого уже не помнили эвенкийского языка, здесь он по торжественным дням исполнял свое любимое сказание на якутском языке. С богатой добычей под Новый год возвращались охотники домой, тогда радость, веселье царили во всех домах, охотники в семейном кругу отдыхали душой. Чтобы слушать Н.Г. Трофимова, жители села по вечерам собирались, с собой по очереди приносили огарки свечей и всю ночь слушали сказителя.

Мне довелось несколько раз слушать пение сказителя. При появлении желаемого гостя, радостно перешептывались, что приехал Нукучан (имя Николай по-эвенкийски). Его высокий стройный рост и пронзительный взгляд заставляли обратить внимание на себя. В кругу своих сородичей он исполнял свое нескончаемое сказание. Старики, вдохновляя певца, время от времени выражали свое отношение возгласами: «Тэде!» («Правда!»), «Кэ! Кэ!» («Ну! Ну!»). Перед смертью Н.Г. Трофимов записал на эвенкийском языке свое последнее сказание «Храбрый Содани-богатырь».

Последние годы жизни работал пастухом в оленеводческой бригаде по р. Учур и перенёс тяжелую болезнь. Он был человеком с сильным духом, после приступа один запряг своих оленей и приехал в Кутану, откуда был отправлен в г. Алдан, где и скончался в возрасте 56 лет.

Из воспоминаний А.Н. Мыреевой, автора героического эвенкийского эпоса: «Судьба мне предоставила счастливую возможность общаться с этим удивительным сказителем. Звонкоголосый сын эвенкийского народа Николай Трофимов первым проторил широкую дорогу всем другим народам Сибири и Дальнего Востока - первый том с его нимнгаканами под названием «Эвенкийские сказания», первый из 60-томной серии, имеющей мировое значение, и пусть эта дорога не зарастет и останется на века».

Кутанянки гордятся тем, что на древней земле Учурской эвенков Анна Николаевна Мыреева, после встречи со сказителем эвенкийский нимнгаканов Трофимовым Н.Г. оставила неоценимый труд по сохранению уникального памятника эвенкийского народа. А.Н. Мыреева лауреат премии «Звезда утренней зари», кандидат философских наук, зав. сектором северной филологии ИЯЛИ Якутского филиала СО АН Р.Ф., после окончания Ленинградского пединститута им. Герцена в 1956 г. была направлена в Кутанинскую семилетнюю школу, где произошла встреча двух уникальных представителей эвенкийского народа: хранителя древнейшей культуры - эвенкийского эпоса и будущего ученого-исследователя, она заслуженно пользуется большой любовью и уважением у своих земляков, почитателей её научной и творческой деятельности.

Анну Николаевну от всей души поздравляем с юбилеем. Желаем здоровья, добра и благополучия.

*Л.Абрамова,
директор Этнографического музея
Алданского улуса,
с. Кутана
05.12.2005 г.*

Appendix 3,4. Photography on the left: Nikolai Trofimov (Nukuchan)

Photography on the right: Praskovia Trofimova (the wife of Nukuchan) with their son Vasilii



Appendix 5 Consent form

One copy of this completed form should be given to the participating interviewee and the other retained by the interviewer

Title of thesis: Evenki language revitalization in Sakha Republic (Yakutia)

Name of researcher: Mira Sivtseva

Institution: Arctic University of Norway, University of Tromsø. Tromsø, Norway

(to be completed by participating interviewees)

I agree to take part in the above study and (please tick those you agree to):

To be interviewed

Have my interview audio recorded

Have my interview video recorded

I confirm that I have been given description of the research I take part in and have had the opportunity to ask questions

I understand that my participation in research as interviewee is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time

I wish for my personal data to remain anonymous

Name of interviewee

Date

Signature

Name of researcher

Date

Signature