

Grammatical substitution and attrition in Taimyr Evenki – Structural patterns of indigenous language contact in Northern Siberia at the beginning of the 20th century

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Taimyr Evenki (< Tungusic) is a nowadays extinct variety of the Evenki language, the latter being spoken by ca. 5,000 people in Northern and Eastern Siberia (VPN 2010). Taimyr Evenki is documented in roughly 300 manuscript pages, collected and transcribed in 1908/1909 by the Russian ethnographer and linguist K.M. Rychkov. The given material is digitized, glossed and analyzed in the INEL Evenki Corpus (Däbritz & Gusev 2021; 9,765 utterances, 47,778 tokens), including 2,664 utterances and 12,705 tokens of Taimyr Evenki speech.

The Taimyr Evenki variety diverges significantly from other Evenki varieties on all structural levels of the language. Taking into account the theoretical works of Fishman (1965), Sasse (1992), Campbell (1994), Curnow (2001) and Thomason (2001), parts of the variation point toward Dolgan (< Turkic) influence causing grammatical substitution in Taimyr Evenki. The outstandingly high frequency (195 per 10,000 tokens in Taimyr Evenki vs 77 per 10,000 tokens in the whole INEL Evenki Corpus) of clause chains formed with a sequential converb (1) is a case in point since the pattern is typical of Turkic languages (Johanson 2021: 753) but rather atypical of Tungusic languages. On the other hand, parts of the variation point towards attrition, e.g. the usage of the bare verb stem in purpose clauses (2). In this case, a model for the pattern is lacking; instead, the loss of morphosyntactic complexity as an instance of simplification is observable since the purposive converb would be expected in the subordinate clause judging from other Evenki varieties.

- (1) *D'aw-matami* *a-hi-ča.*
eat-CVB.SEQ sleep-INCEP-PTCP.PST
'Having eaten, he fell asleep.' ~ 'He ate and fell asleep.'
(Däbritz & Gusev 2021; NNR_190X_OrphanShaman_flk.061)

- (2) *Ta-duk* *huru-čo* *galakti* *afi-ji.*
that-ABL leave-PTCP.PST search woman-RFL.POSS.SG
'Then he went off to search for his wife.'
(Däbritz & Gusev 2021; NNR_190X_NelheKokora_flk.007)

Both patterns, i.e. grammatical substitution and attrition, match the sociolinguistic situation on the Taimyr Peninsula at the fin-de-siècle of the 19th and 20th centuries. During the 19th century, the Dolgan language – historically, a variety of Sakha (Yakut) with heavy Evenki substrate – had developed into a high prestige language, and speakers of Taimyr Evenki were shifting to Dolgan (cf. Stern 2012 and Stapert 2013 for details). The described Taimyr Evenki material appears to represent the speech of the last generation of shifting speakers, thus, documenting a historical case of indigenous language contact.

The paper at hand presents a dozen structural linguistic features, which illustrate this historical case and may underline theoretical assumptions of structural patterns of language contact and contact-induced language change. Furthermore, the paper shows the vital role of corpus linguistics in studying historical language data since corpora allow for both qualitative and quantitative research on a solid empirical base.

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