Change and variation in shifting community: A modern grammar of modern Even

Research and documentation of endangered languages introduces a variety of considerations around speaker diversity that prototypical approaches may ignore. Speaker variation, linguistic value judgments, competing forms and reconciliation with other grammars (Nagy 2009) are all topics that must be addressed for these minority languages. This paper focuses on one such highly endangered language, Even (ISO 639-3 eve; Tungusic), spoken in the far northeastern part of Russia in Arctic and Subarctic regions. Ongoing language shift shows variation in the linguistic systems of speakers, added to existing (pre-shift) regional variation. In this talk we discuss how these fluid linguistic practices can be described and documented in a grammar.

Our primary aims are twofold. First, we present research methods that are intended to capture the grammars of shifting speakers. We find tremendous variation in their grammars in both controlled elicitation and freer, more spontaneous speech, but this variation is systematic. Second, we discuss how to analyze and present these differences in a grammar. Concrete examples include changes in word order, government patterns and case usage, and changes in morphosyntax in complex construction. Traditional Even is head-final, agglutinative, with an extensive case system and rigid SOV word order (Malchukov 1995).

One result of ongoing changes is dynamic language communities, with distinct linguistic practices, and different local grammars. Modern speakers, both those who are fluent but not conservative, as well as shifting speakers, use word order patterns more like those of Russian, where word order is largely determined by information structure. For some modern speakers, at least half of finite clauses are not V-final, frequently with an oblique argument after the verb (1b, 2a), but also in what appears to replicate Russian presentational word order, with a new subject introduced in final position (1c). Tasks targeting production with constrained lexical stimuli to produce a set of sentences comparable across speakers show variation in case usage and converbs. (2) shows variation in case marking for the source of the verb 'ask for, request' with an argument in the ablative case (2a), the allative (2b), and the locative (2c); while one speaker changes the verb to 'give' but puts the direct object in the instrumental case instead of the expected dative (2d).

How do we decide which word order, and which government patterns, to include in a reference grammar? How can a reference grammar succinctly capture variation and, more specifically, how does a reference grammar describe linguistic structure in the context of a shifting language ecology? How do fluid levels of speaker proficiency and ongoing language change fit into linguistic documentation? With this talk we attempt to address the practices of all speaker groups in the creation of a grammar and hope to open up discussion on ways to conscientiously capture variation within these situations.

Documentation of, and research on, Even began prior to the onset of extensive language shift (as an early example, see Bogoraz 1931). Existing grammars and linguistic analyses describe a traditional, pre-shift variety that, our fieldwork suggests, is not spoken today, or at best by a very limited number of elderly conservative speakers. For example, Cincius (1947) for a description of phonology and morphology; Malchukov (1989) is a sketch grammar; Pakendorf & Aralova (2020) provide an overview of Even and other Transeurasian languages. Other work is theoretical linguistics, not descriptive grammar (e.g. Malchukov 2008; Pakendorf & Krivoshapkina 2014; Pakendorf 2017, 2019). Moreover, any comparable material from when Even was robustly spoken is from the Soviet period and documents only regional variation in opposition to the standard language (Novikova 1980; Robbek 1989 and others). Now with a greatly reduced number of speakers, we also must reconcile the previously documented regional difference with new, undocumented variation that is as a result of change due to attrition and shift.

Examples
from field recordings (2017, 2019) in Bilibino, Chersky &Yakutsk, Sakha Republic, Russia.

1. **Word order, with verb in blue**
(1a) *Nakat-damar*   *noŋ-ma-n*   *höŋkidə-ri-n*
      bear=CONJ   3SG-ACC-3SG   kick-PST-3SG
(1b) *ɲan*   *noda-ri-n*   *noŋ-ma-n*   *barda-la.*
      and   throw-PST-3SG   3SG-ACC-3SG   opposite.side-LOC
      'And the bear kicked him, and threw him to the opposite side'

(1c) *əgdʒə-təkki*   *əm-rə-n*   *əgdʒə-təkki*   *əm-rə-n*   *munrukan-Ø.*
      moose-ALL   come-PST-3SG   moose-ALL   come-PST-3SG   hare-NOM
      'Up to the moose there came, up to the moose there came a hare'

2. **Variation in government & case assignment (and word order)**
Target: *The girl asks X for the doll.*
(2a) *asatkan-Ø*   *əkən-duk-ij*   *asč-Ø-in*   *bəikə-m*
      girl-NOM   older.brother-ABL- POSS.REFL   ask-PRS-3SG   doll-ACC

(2b) *mgm*   *asatkan-Ø*   *ee*   *bəikən-Ø*   *asatkan-taki*   *gasči-daj*
      mhm   girl-NOM   uh   doll-NOM   girl-ALL   ask-CVB.PURP

(2c) *bəikən-Ø*   *asatkan-dula*   *kukla-ß*   *gasči-d-da-n*
      doll-NOM   girl-LOC   doll-ACC   ask-IPFV-N.FUT-3SG

(2d) *asatkan-Ø*   *bəikə-m*   *nö-di*   *bö-Ø-n*
      girl-NOM   doll-ACC   younger.brother-INST give-PRS-3SG

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