



Dialectal and cultural diversity among Siberian Èvens

The language

Èven is a North Tungusic language spoken over a vast area of northeastern Siberia, from the Lena-Jana watershed in the west to the coast of the Okhotsk Sea, Chukotka, and Kamchatka in the east. Two major dialectal groups, Western and Eastern, and twelve dialects are recognized, some only marginally mutually intelligible.



Woman with her granddaughter (Topolnoe)

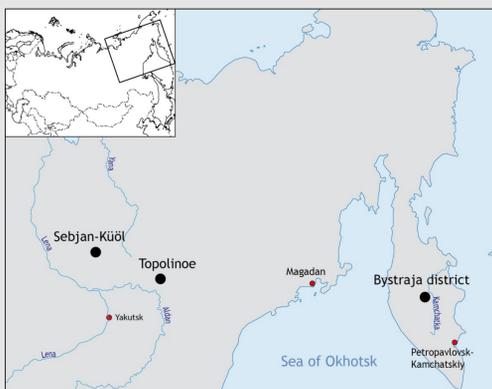
The project

The project documents three highly endangered variants:

The *Lamunkhin dialect* spoken in the area of *Sebjan-Küöl* (Yakutia), which is the westernmost dialect. It has ca. 300 speakers and is still being passed on to children, but is endangered by Yakut.

The *Tompo dialect* spoken in the area of *Topolnoe* (Yakutia), which is geographically between the western and the eastern dialect group. It has 200-250 speakers, all over 40, and is severely endangered by Russian.

The *Bystraja dialect* spoken in *central Kamchatka* is the easternmost dialect. It has ca. 200 speakers, all over 40, and is severely endangered by Russian.



Field sites

Dialectal diversity

One of the guiding questions of the project is to which extent these three variants of Èven differ. Our documentation shows that differences exist at all linguistic levels. Some examples of differences at the level of phonology and lexicon are:

English Translation	Bystraja dialect	Tompo dialect	Lamunkhin dialect
I know	a:ram	h:a:ram	
ice	bukeʃ	bokeh	bohko
summer		dʒugani	irildu
eleven	umenúlek	mjan omen	



Reindeer herd with herder (Kamchatka)

Cultural focus

Traditionally, Èvens are nomadic hunters and reindeer pastoralists. Reindeer, both domesticated and wild, play an important role in their cultural life and ethnic self-identification. Therefore the proposed project seeks to document not only the language, but also the state of reindeer herding among the Èvens in different regional settings and its meaning for the local indigenous population.

Some examples of the salient differences are:

Main basis of subsistence



Both the methods and the terminology of fishing were borrowed from the Itelmen.

On *Kamchatka*, reindeer herding does not provide a means of living for most Èven families any longer. Salmon fishing in forest fishing camps has become an important field of subsistence.



In *Sebjan-Küöl* and *Topolnoe*, the Èvens' subsistence economy is mainly based on reindeer husbandry. Most of the reindeer are raised for their meat and skins and for the production of various items from their antlers, bones, hooves, and inner organs.

Local means of transport



On *Kamchatka*, reindeer have lost their role as means of transport. Instead, horses have gained primary importance. In the snow-free seasons the Èvens strongly rely on the help of horses. In winter they use snowmobiles and dog sledges for transportation. The practice of training dogs for transportation was borrowed from the Koryaks.

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In *Sebjan-Küöl* and *Topolnoe*, reindeer are used throughout the year for transport. They are trained to pull sledges and to carry people or goods on their backs. During the snow-free seasons horses may provide an alternative means, in winter snowmobiles are also used. In the area of *Topolnoe* horses are kept only by some people who have relatives among Yakut horse herders.



Traditional dress (Sebjan-Küöl)

The team

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Woman with a sacred reindeer (called "edjek") (Topolnoe)

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