

**CONTACT-INDUCED CHANGE AND LANGUAGE ATTRITION:
EVENKI IN SIBERIA**

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Evenki is a Tungusic language spoken in Siberia by an estimated 5000 speakers, none of whom are monolingual. Although it has been in contact with Russian and other languages for centuries, it has been undergoing shift since the post World War II era, a shift which, if anything, has accelerated since the breakup of the Soviet Union. In this talk I report on recent fieldwork in Tura, the administrative center for the former Evenki Autonomous Area (Evenkija, now officially part of the Krasnoyarsk Region). As the regional administrative center, Tura is home to people originating from a number of different dialect regions; this mixture of dialects appears to be one of the factors contributing to language shift in the town.

Changes due to attrition are found in all linguistic levels of Evenki spoken in Tura. In the present talk I focus on an analysis of changes in morphosyntax, including: (1) morphological shrinking, in both derivational and inflectional morphology, with complete loss of some categories; (2) fundamental changes in the verbal system; and (3) changes in the morphosyntax of coordination and subordination. I argue that these changes are systematic, not idiosyncratic, and can be fruitfully compared to the linguistic changes found in incomplete language acquisition of heritage speakers (with some differences). The study of language shift in the region raises two important methodological issues: (1) how to loss of a category (or structure or register) which is attested by its absence (rather than by substitution or “misuse” of another morpheme or category); and (2) how to assess change as loss (as opposed to pre-existing absence) when historical documentation is at best spotty.