

Language Ecological Change of the Deer Ewenki in China*

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Abstract—The Deer Ewenki is the smallest group of Ewenki in China. Since the 18th century, significant changes have taken place in the ecological environment of the Deer Evenk language, and the Evenk language, which is interdependent with it, has also changed accordingly. After three important periods of settlement before and after liberation and ecological migration, the Evenk language speakers also changed the original monolingual into a bilingual — Evenk language and Russian and trilingual — Evenk language, Russian and Chinese, and till now the speakers of this language gradually disappeared, the language used by the Deer Ewenki has entered the list of endangered languages.

Keywords—Deer Ewenki; language ecology; endangered languages

I. INTRODUCTION

Ewenki is one of the minority nationalities in north China, and also one of the minority nationalities with a total population of less than 100,000. Historically, the Ewenki were divided into three branches – 'Sauron', 'Tungus' and 'The deer tribe'. The natural living environment and production mode of these three branches are obviously different. According to this, some scholars divide them into Ewenki people of animal husbandry, Ewenki people of agriculture and Ewenki people of the deer. [1]The Deer Ewenki is the smallest group of Ewenki people in China, accounting for only 0.7% of the total population of them. They have been engaged in ancient hunting and production, known as "the last hunting tribe in China".

Linguistic ecology refers to the interdependence and interaction between a specific language and the social culture and geographical environment of the ethnic group, which is a complex body composed of the geographical, social, economic and cultural factors etc. of language. Since the 18th century, great changes have taken place in the ecological environment of the Deer Evenk language, the Evenk language, which is interdependent with it, also changed, in the process of survival and cultural changes, a series of problems have arisen in the language inheritance of the Deer Ewenki people, and even they

have entered the list of endangered languages.

II. THE LANGUAGE ECOLOGY OF THE DEER EVENK BEFORE LIBERATION

The ancestors of the Deer Ewenki were first inhabit along the outer baikal and the tundra highlands along its shores, in the mid-16th and 17th centuries, the Deer Ewenki, unable to bear Russian oppression and years of war, followed the reindeer down the Shilka river to the opposite side of Mohe, At that time, the Ewenki people had 4 major clans and more than 700 people. Till 1945, the Deer Ewenki people kept their primitive hunting lifestyle, and the basic social organization was 'Ulileng', stay in the disintegration of the patriarchal family commune stage at the end of the primitive society. The primitive production and life style and the closed traffic make the macro language ecology of the Deer Evenk language basically maintain the original style, with little overall change.

During this period, the micro-language ecology of the Deer Ewenki changed due to disease disaster, military invasion, material exchange, religious transmission and other factors. In the 1880s, due to the famine in the Greater Kingan Mountains, some Deer Ewenki people crossed the Ergona river with their wives and daughters to work as tenants in Wuqilov of Russia, some children entered the Russian school to learn Russian. According to Lindger's investigation, several young and middle-aged Deer Ewenki enabled to read and write Russian, which further deepened the influence of Russian on the Deer Evenk language.[2] After the Russian October revolution, the productivity of the Deer Ewenki people, who used guns as hunting tools, was improved, and the natural economy, which had been closed, was impacted. They traded more frequently with the Russians on the right bank of Erguna. After 1917, more than 300 Russians from Wuqirovtun moved to Qigantun, forming a mixed living pattern of Russian, Han and sino-russian descendants and the Deer Ewenki, during this period, the Deer Ewenki people were gradually influenced by various Russian cultural elements, and the characteristics of russification became more prominent, there were even a lot of Deer Ewenki bilinguals who spoke Russian and believed in orthodox Christianity. According to the investigation and research of scholars, many young, middle and old people in this period knew Russian as well as their own language, sometimes they talk with a third party in Russian, but few of them can write Russian.[3] Population migration and

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integration also led to changes in the ecology of the language itself, especially showed the brand of extensive contact in the vocabulary level, some Russian words related to tools of production, means of production and daily necessities entered the daily language of Deer Ewenki.

III. TWICE SETTLED DOWN AFTER LIBERATION AND THE DEER EWENKI LANGUAGE ECOLOGY

After the founding of new China, the communist party and the government free the Deer Ewenki from slavery and oppression in the old society, the Deer Ewenki people leap by the end of primitive commune patriarchal clan society to modern society, from the original ignorance to the modern civilization, especially after the twice settlement for the Deer Ewenki carrying out by the communist party and the government, the local language ecological environment has undergone earth-shaking changes.

In the early stage of liberation, the survival situation of Deer Ewenki, a tiny group, attracted the attention of the communist party and the state, it was an important measure for the communist party and the state to end the production mode of hunting as soon as possible and realize "settlement". The first settlement of the Deer Ewenki took place in the 1950s. In February 1957, Qigan Ewenki Ethnic Township was founded, and the Ewenki ethnic autonomous banner was established in the following year, from then on, the Deer Ewenki people enjoyed the right to manage their own internal affairs for the first time. In 1965, influenced by the political and economic factors at that time, 137 Deer Ewenki people from 35 families moved from Qigantun in Erguna right banner to Aoluguya in Erguna left banner, establishing Aoluguya Ewenki Nationality Township and completing the second settlement.

The two settlements with the help of the communist party and the government have improved the production and living conditions, health and medical conditions, and cultural and educational environment of the Deer Ewenki people, and greatly changed the macro language ecology of Deer Ewenki. For example, in the field of economic and cultural education, the government invests a lot of money in the process of the two settlement for constructing houses, opening up new hunting grounds, replacing old guns, implementing free to heal, and setting up the national elementary school, etc., the Deer Ewenki population base is gradually risen and the per capita income of them is increased sharply during this process, clans intermarry phenomenon is more common, and the relationship with other ethnic groups, especially with the HuaE seed is more harmonious. In the economic communication with the descendants of Chinese-Russian, Russian language has gradually become the main communication bridge between the two groups; In daily life, every 'Ulileng' also teaches Russian to each other, few adults cannot speak Russian at that time, most middle-aged people can speak Russian, can spell the national language with Russian alphabet.[3] In addition, the Russian language is also widely used in the names of the Deer Ewenki people, such as "Rajmi", "Barajay", "Maria" and "Genie" are the names used by the first and second generations of the Deer Ewenki people.

During the settlement of Deer Ewenki, the penetration and influence of Chinese language gradually increased. Especially after the settlement of Deer Ewenki in Laoao Township, the opportunities for mutual assistance and communication between Deer Ewenki and Han merchants increased, and the phenomenon of intermarriage with Han became more and more common. According to statistics, from 1957 to 1988, there were 48 people married with other ethnic groups, among whom 36 were married with the Han nationality, accounting for 75% of the total number of mixed marriages.[4] In addition, the rise of school education has also changed the original language ecology pattern of Deer Ewenki. Before liberation, the Ewenki had never had a school. In 1953, the communist party and the government set up an ethnic primary school for them, and all expenses were borne by the state. The teachers are familiar with Chinese, Russian and Evenk language, and the Chinese textbooks used in teaching are determined according to the opinions of Ewenki people, the teaching languages include Chinese, Russian and Evenk language, among which Chinese and Russian are the main teaching languages, and Evenk language is mainly translated into Chinese and Russian by older students. After the establishment of the school, the students of the Deer Ewenki achieved remarkable results in language learning. All the Deer Ewenki students can read and write Chinese in less than one year. [3]

After the 1990s, the development of politics, economy, culture and education in Deer Ewenki residential area reached a new level, and the macro language ecology also changed positively. The influence of Han culture on Deer Ewenki became more and more profound. From the perspective of ethnic language ability, the younger generation of Deer Ewenki can no longer speak Russian. Their national language is challenged to some extent without their own character. The people under 30 are basically sinicized, and few people can understand the Evenk language. People between 30 and 45 years old can understand it, but they basically use Chinese in daily communication. When they communicate with the elderly, they will speak Evenk language with more than half of the Chinese in it. People aged 45 to 65 communicate with foreign ethnic groups or children in Chinese, and older people in their own ethnic groups in Evenk language. Only those over the age of 65 communicate in the national language. [5] It can be said that at this stage, more than 90% of the people in this micro-group can communicate in Chinese. Chinese has replaced Evenk language as the first communicative language of Deer Ewenki people. [6]

IV. LANGUAGE ECOLOGY OF DEER EWENKI AFTER ECOLOGICAL MIGRATION

In August 2003, the communist party and the government carried out the overall ecological migration for Deer Ewenki people, settled down at the suburbs of Genhe city, the Ewenki hunters leave the forests that lived for thousands of years in the end, put down his rifle and started a new life, all the politics, economy, culture, education and other undertakings of the Aoluguya Township inhabited by the Deer Ewenki stepped into new phase.

The changes of geographical environment, economic model and social cultural system in the communities of Deer

Ewenki lead to the great changes of the language ecological environment which is related to it. In more than 10 years since 2003, the language used by the Deer Ewenki people has disappeared rapidly, "already in the state of endangered languages" [7]. According to the statistics in 2012, there are 294 Aoluguya Ewenki people, among whom those under the age of 20 have completely given up their national language and do not know Ewenki at all. Among people aged 20 to 50, some can understand a little, but cannot speak, while some can communicate simply. Although a minority of people over 50 years old can communicate in their own language, most of the time using Chinese. [8]

From 2014 to 2016, the author conducted a survey in Aoluguya township of Genhe city, and found that more than 95% of the Ewenki people in this township could not speak Aoluguya dialect at all, and their daily contact with Aoluguya dialect was limited to conversations with very few older elders. According to the survey on the relationship between language and nationality, 85% of the people think that the most important national characteristics of Deer Ewenki are reflected in the "festival", 13% of the people think that "dress" is a significant national symbol, and almost no one regards "language" as the sign of Deer Ewenki. Judging from the future trend of the development of national language, almost everyone think that language used by Deer Ewenki people are endangered, but 95% of them hope school teaching adopts "the ethnic languages and Chinese", 77% of people think that radio and television should use their native language and Chinese, but from the perspective of language emotion, Deer Ewenki people still hope that the scope of the use of the national language can be gradually expanded.

In fact, in recent years, with the enhancement of the language protection awareness of the local government and the Deer Ewenki people, the language ecology of the Deer Ewenki has also undergone some remarkable changes in the process of the overall development towards the state of "endangered". First, in terms of school education, since 2011, Aoluguya Ewenki ethnic primary school in Genhe city has focused on the inheritance of ethnic language. The language textbook of the school adopts the Aolukuya Evenk Language Reader compiled by Gu Xianglian, director of the national and religious affairs administration of Genhe city, each class is required to have one Evenk language class every week. The charm of Evenk language is fully demonstrated by teaching Ewenki dialogues, Ewenki folktales and Ewenki folk songs, which greatly stimulates students' interest in Evenk language and achieves good results. Second, various daily folk activities provide Ewenki people with a platform to learn their own national language and folk culture. In 2013, Aoluguya Ewenki speech and folk song contest were held in Aoxiang, and 18 contestants from Aoluguya participated in the contest. In August 2014, the township government of Aoxiang held a training class on Aoluguya Ewenki language and folk culture knowledge, and invited the elder Balaje, the inheritant of Aoluguya Ewenki Shaman costumes and utensils about the autonomous region intangible cultural heritage, to explain the Evenk language and Shaman culture. Thirdly, tourism, the mainstay of the local industry, has also promoted the enthusiasm of Deer Ewenki people to learn the national language to some extent. With the

rise of tourism in Aolukuya, a large number of domestic and foreign tourists come to experience the beautiful scenery of "the land of reindeer" and the culture of "the last Chinese deer tribe". The income of the Deer Ewenki people has been increasing, and the life of the hunters has undergone gratifying changes. In the process of the local government's efforts to create the tourism culture with the national characteristics of Deer Ewenki, many local people spontaneously learned Aolukuya dialect, including basic dialogues, folk songs and other forms. To integrate the Aoluguya dialect into tourism economic development not only improves the economic benefits of the local people, but also plays a role in inheriting the language and culture of Deer Ewenki.

V. CONCLUSION

Since the 18th century, the micro-language ecology used by the Deer Ewenki people has undergone rapid changes: from the earliest Evenk monolinguals to Evenk bilinguals-Evenk language and Russian, to Evenk trilinguals — Evenk language, Russian and Chinese and Evenk bilinguals — Evenk language and Chinese, the Deer Ewenki almost gave up the national language and switched to another language with stronger communicative function — Chinese till now. A series of changes occurred in the ecological and cultural changes of the Deer Ewenki, such as the sharp decrease of population, the blocking of traffic and the lag of school education, are the important factors leading to the gradual endangered of the Deer Ewenki language

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