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The Dynamics of Multilingualism in an Arctic Language Ecology

The Anabar District

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Abstract

The Dolgan language is a Turkic variety, closely related to Sakha but differing from it due to contact, primarily with Evenki (Tungusic). We analyze the linguistic identity of translocal Dolgan communities in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) in the Anabar District, which is home to a minority of the larger group of Dolgan people. Linguistically, Anabar Dolgan is best classified as a northern Sakha variety with significant lexical borrowings from Tungusic. Anabar Dolgans consider it a separate language, and see themselves as speaking Dolgan, Sakha, or a mixture of the two. Their strong sense of Dolgan identity comes from an attachment to language, culture, and territory, an identity reinforced by social ties with and ongoing migrations to and from the Taymyr Dolgan-Nenets District, home to the majority of Dolgans. Data come from sociolinguistic questionnaires, structured interviews, and linguistic elicitation with 50 respondents, and a subset of open-ended interviews.

Keywords

Dolgan – Sakha – Evenki – translocality – ethnic identity

1 Introduction: The Anabar District

The Anabar District, located in the Arctic region of northwestern Sakha Republic, is relatively isolated and home to historically high levels of multilingualism. Today it continues to be a multilingual and multiethnic region, with speakers of Russian, Evenki (Tungusic) and Sakha (Turkic) and Dolgan (a Turkic contact variety with Evenki substrate and some borrowings from Russian). This paper focuses on a study of ethnic Dolgan in the Anabar District (or *ulus*) living in two settlements: Yuryung-Khaya (Sakha *Ürüŋ ɣaja*), home to the densest population of ethnic Dolgans living in the Republic; and Saskylakh where the population consists primarily of Dolgan and Evenki. We show how self-identity of Anabar Dolgans is linked to linguistic repertoire and place, and how this sense of ethnolinguistic identity is constructed with ongoing translocal practices.

The Anabar Dolgans are a subgroup of a larger community of Dolgans who live primarily in the Taymyr Dolgan-Nenets Municipal District (henceforth the



FIGURE 1 Map of Taimyr Dolgan-Nenets District and Anabar District

Taymyr District) of the Krasnoyarsk Territory of the Russian Federation, in highest concentrations in the city of Dudinka and the village of Khatgana. The Dolgans, with a total population of 8157 (National Structure, 2020), are officially classified as an Indigenous minority in the Russian Federation. The 2020 All-Russia Census¹ shows 2147 Dolgans, or just over 26% of the total population, living in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), the largest group of Dolgans living outside of the Taymyr District. The densest population of Dolgans in the Sakha Republic reside in the far north, in the Anabar National Dolgan-Evenki Ulus (or the *Anabar District*).

The map in Fig. 1 provides an overview of the regions, with the Anabar District outlined in red and the two villages where we conducted our fieldwork, Saskylakh and Yuryung-Khaya, indicated with blue squares. The village of Yuryung-Khaya boasts the densest population of ethnic Dolgans living in the Sakha Republic; the population of Saskylakh is mixed Dolgan and Evenki. To the east lies the Taymyr District.

The Dolgan language emerged as a contact variety due to heavy contact between speakers of Sakha, Evenki, Russian (Section 3.1). It is unquestionably

1 The All-Russia Census was scheduled to be conducted in 2020 but was conducted October–November 2021 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is officially referred to as the 2020 Census in Russian governmental documents. See <https://rosstat.gov.ru/vpn/2020> and <https://eng.rosstat.gov.ru/folder/13901/document/168696> (for general discussion in English).

a Turkic language and is closely related to the Sakha language, which is the majority language of the Sakha Republic, spoken by both ethnic Sakha and a number of other ethnic groups living there. Of course, throughout the region the national language is Russian, but many areas are still Sakha-dominant. The Dolgan and Sakha languages are closely related Northeastern Turkic languages comprising the North Siberian subgroup. Dolgan was long classified by the Soviets as a dialect of Sakha (Comrie, 1981: 53); Ubrjatova (1985) has argued that Dolgan emerged as a distinct language from the 16th century on, albeit containing both Evenki and Sakha elements. Historically, the Dolgan were multilingual and highly mobile, continuing the lifestyle of Evenki nomadic reindeer herders. Some of them moved from the Taymyr District to the northwestern region of what today is the Sakha Republic, or modern Anabar.

We use the term variety as a neutral label that does not presuppose a clear distinction between language and dialect. Official classification (by Russian and Sakha authorities), and many linguistic sources, distinguish dialects, in general referring to what we would call regional varieties. It is important to understand that within the context of the Russian Federation, there is a robust system that classifies a language versus a dialect group and an individual dialect. The government determines which languages officially exist. Here we use the official terminology where it is found in sources that we cite. Our claims about the Anabar Dolgan variety as being sociolinguistically motivated as distinct from other northern Sakha varieties suggest that it may perhaps most accurately be considered a sociolect, but it shares features with other northern Sakha varieties and with Taymyr Dolgan.

Due to its relative isolation, the Anabar District presents a particularly interesting case study of small communities and multilingual practices. Multilingualism in the Russian Arctic has been studied from the perspective of small-scale multilingualism (Lüpke, 2016; 2021) in the Lower Kolyma region (Pupynina and Aralova, 2021) and in the Lower Yenesei area (Khanina, 2021), where many members of the local communities know and use multiple Indigenous languages, with a lack of social hierarchy. We find a somewhat different pattern in Saskylakh and Yuryung-Khaya: while the predecessors of the modern Anabar Dolgan were highly multilingual, today their linguistic repertoire is reduced. The dominant, daily language is Sakha, or more specifically a local variety of Sakha, with secondary usage of Russian. In our fieldwork we did not find any local use of Evenki in Saskylakh or Yuryung-Khaya and find no evidence of multilingual usage of Indigenous local languages in this region. Instead, our consultants see themselves as speaking a “mixed language” or their “own” language; many do not use the labels Dolgan or Sakha. We refer to this variety as *Anabar Dolgan* as we find no linguistic or social grounds for distinguishing

the lects spoken in Saskylakh and Yuryung-Khaya from one another. There are, however, reasons to consider Taymyr Dolgan as distinct, sociolinguistically at least and possibly linguistically, with more Russian elements in Taymyr Dolgan than in Anabar Dolgan, which is in ongoing contact (and possibly in competition) with Colloquial Sakha. Moreover, shift from Dolgan to Russian is more advanced among the Taymyr group: Stapert (2013: 27) found that it was already difficult to find fluent speakers of Dolgan under the age of 25 at the time of her fieldwork in the region. This is not the case in the Anabar District, where Anabar Dolgan is robustly spoken by younger people as well as older generations and we find fewer lexical borrowings from Russian, less code-mixing and less usage of Russian than in interviews with Taymyr Dolgan (see Section 5 and examples 15–17).

1.1 *The Anabar District: Demographics and Language Ecology*

The Anabar District (Sah² *Anaabyr uluuha*) is located in the northwestern part of the Sakha Republic, it is a large territory comprising some 55,600 km² and sparsely populated with a total population of 3653.³ The village of Saskylakh is the administrative center of the district and home to approximately 2/3 of Anabar's population. Indigenous minorities, Dolgan, Evenki, Even and Yukaghir, comprise 70% of Saskylakh's population. At the time of our fieldwork in 2021, there was no internet access in Anabar, and people isolated from outside contact, even contact from another village in Anabar was challenging. Demographic data is provided in Table 1; these figures were provided by the administrative centers of each village in 2021.

The village of Yuryung-Khaya is unique in the Republic as the only place with a high density of Dolgan residents. Of its total population of 1217, Dolgans comprise the largest percentage, followed by Sakha, Evenki, and Even, as seen in Table 2.

Despite the harsh living conditions, there has been no significant outmigration or population loss. Instead, the population shows a modest increase of 144 people (71 in Saskylakh and 73 in Yuryung-Khaya) from the 2010 to the 2020 All-Russia Census. There is a high probability that the stable demographic situation is maintained due to the fact that the traditional way of life – reindeer herding and fishing – is maintained in the District. Since 2014, the number of reindeer has grown every year, and in 2020, there was a total count of 20,862 reindeer. Fishing, fish and meat production constitute the largest growing local

2 We abbreviate Dolgan as Dlg, Russian as Ru, and Sakha as Sah.

3 <https://bdex.ru/naselenie/respublika-saha-yakutiya/n/anabarskiy/>

TABLE 1 Ethnic make-up of population in Saskylakh (2021)

Ethnic group	Number	Percentage
Evenki	727	30.0%
Dolgan	696	28.7%
Sakha	606	25.0%
Even	267	11.0%
Russian	121	5.0%
Yukaghir	7	0.3%
total	2424	100%

TABLE 2 Ethnic make-up of population in Yuryung-Khaya (2021)

Ethnic group	Number	Percentage
Dolgan	898	74%
Sakha	193	16%
Evenki	35	3%
Even	19	1%
other	72	6%
total	1217	100%

industries, creating jobs for the local population, especially for young people. Industrial companies allocate dividends to the Anabar District's budget, and also contribute to the creation of additional jobs. Dolgans and Evenks are actively engaged in cultural activities: the annual gathering of reindeer herders and the traditional Bayanai festival are held yearly, and two modern cultural centers (*Heiro* in Yuryung-Khaya and *Almaz* in Saskylakh) have been built. Folk artisans continue to create unique national costumes, utensils and other ethnocultural products.

1.2 *Translocality and the Anabar District*

The notion of *translocality* (Greiner and Sakdapolrak, 2013) provides a framework for analyzing the complex multilingual practices in the villages of Saskylakh and Yuryung-Khaya. Translocality here is defined as “a variety of enduring,

open, and non-linear processes, which produce close interrelations between different places and people. These interrelations and various forms of exchange are created through migration flows and networks that are constantly questioned and reworked” (Peth, 2018). Translocality is a useful theoretical construct to account for the fact that the Dolgan are at once both linked to the local place and also mobile, often migratory, and connected to both one another and to people still living in the places they have left behind (the Taymyr). Ongoing immigration from the Taymyr District to Anabar reinvigorates Dolgan linguistic practices and identity. In the same vein, travel from the Anabar District to the Taymyr Dolgan communities reinforces these connections, which are further strengthened as Anabar men marry Taymyr women, who then resettle in Yuryung-Khaya but maintain contact with their families in the Taymyr District. The strong ties between place and identity reinforces a strong sense of language ideologies and Dolgan identity and the use of their individual linguistic repertoires to invoke a more or less Dolgan-like variety.

Although translocality is often used as an extension, or even a synonym, of transnationalism, it can be understood to describe “phenomena involving mobility, migration, circulation, and spatial interconnectedness not necessarily limited to national borders” (Greiner and Sakdapolrak, 2013: 373). Translocality in the present study highlights and accounts for the connectivity and a kind of hybrid identity and identification with place. Connectivity here refers to the relations between groups of peoples together with their association with space(s) that cross territorial boundaries. In the cases here, some of the Dolgan in the Anabar region have lived there for generations, while others have immigrated from the Taymyr region.

Thus, people in Anabar are translocal, coming from different places, and are connected to both the region they came from and the village where they now live. They exhibit strong ties between place and identity, which in turn informs how they use language, and reinforces a strong sense of ethnic identity and language ideologies. In Yuryung-Khaya, everyone saw themselves as Dolgan, people self-identify as Dolgan, and many stated that they speak a mixed language, or some sort of idiosyncratic language – not Sakha and of course not Russian but also admittedly not Dolgan. They use language as a distinct marker of identity. They are deeply connected with the Dolgans living in the Taymyr District, some in fact having moved recently from there to Anabar, and others more ideologically. Many Dolgans in Yuryung-Khaya engage in traditional reindeer herding, which makes them deeply connected to place in a broad sense (as they migrate with the herds).

In Saskylakh the situation is somewhat different because, alongside ethnic Dolgans, we interviewed ethnic Evenki. They too have a strong sense of iden-

tity and members of both groups arrived for the interviews in native dress. The language ecology here is further complicated by the fact that it is the regional administrative seat, and thus the center of considerable traffic for people coming and going. A further confounder is the presence of the diamond mining industry: Anabar Diamonds (Almazy Anabara) employs approximately 700 people in winter and some 1,200–1,300 people in summer in alluvial diamond mining. The workers live outside of Yuryung-Khaya in a separate compound so there is minimal interaction with the local population, but Saskylakh is nonetheless the transportation center as it is also home to the only nearby airport.

2 Methodology

Fieldwork in the Anabar District in the villages of Saskylakh and Yuryung-Khaya was conducted in August 2021 by the authors as a team; 4 of the 5 are fully fluent in both Russian and Sakha. We conducted structured sociolinguistic interviews with each respondent about language knowledge, usage, attitudes and collected information about each respondent's language profile and background. We had longer, open-ended interviews and conversations with a smaller group of individuals who spent more time with us. These interviews were conducted in Sakha unless an individual preferred to speak in Russian. (None of the local respondents were able to conduct an interview in Evenki. One participant, having studied it at the university in Neryungri, was able to provide a few Evenki words, with prompting from the interviewer.) After the interview, respondents were asked to watch a short video with no spoken or written language, only music, and tell the story of what they saw first in the local language (Dolgan or Sakha) and then in Russian. The video runs approximately 2 and a half minutes and depicts a moose and a bear on a narrow bridge, trying to cross a ravine from opposite sides, struggling for the right of way. A rabbit and raccoon also enter the picture. We also conducted unstructured interviews with a subset of participants, meeting for longer discussions and less formally. Some of the older respondents participated only in longer, unstructured discussions and interviews in their homes. In Yuryung-Khaya we held an open town hall meeting, where residents shared their views about the language situation and asked questions. These open-ended discussions and informal interviews provide important qualitative data that help us assess the local language ecology. In addition, we collected available data from local administrators to help determine extralinguistic (ethnographic, cultural, economic, and political) factors affecting the current state of language use and knowledge in both villages.

TABLE 3 Gender and age of participants (N=50)

		Saskylakh	Yuryung-Khaya	Total
Gender	men	7	10	17
	women	18	15	33
Ages	19–34	4	11	15
	35–59	13	8	21
	60–	8	6	14

A total of 50 residents of the Anabar District were interviewed: 25 consultants in the village of Yuryung-Khaya and another 25 in Saskylakh. The ages and gender breakdown in each group are provided in Table 3.

More than 30 hours of audio and video material were recorded, about 1000 various photos were taken. Our analysis here is based on data collected from interviews and questionnaire data, collected in Dolgan, Sakha, and Russian, supplemented with published statistical data. Since the interviews were conducted in the target language, they also provide important linguistic data.

Another source of data comes from the *Yuryung-Khaya Dolgan dialect dictionary* (Spiridonova and Spiridonov, 2001), created by local language activists. The dictionary contains some 750 entries, which the authors consider as differing from standard Sakha. This means that the dictionary is at once both a valuable resource for studying the Yuryung-Khaya lexicon as well as an indicator of how local speakers view their variety. A preliminary semantic analysis of the dictionary (Malysheva et al., 2022) shows correlations between the lexical inventory of Anabar Dolgan and our own analysis.

3 Dolgan as a Translocal People

The Anabar Dolgan community is attached to the territory they live on, and there are strong ties between the community and the land. Filippova et al. (2021) note their sense of ties to their territory and living in isolation in the extreme north, and in fact many people in Yuryung-Khaya told us that it was the northernmost settlement in the world that is inhabited year round. This is not true, but that it is a widely held belief. The Anabar population is also highly mobile (Section 1.1), with movement between Anabar and the Taymyr District, which it borders in the west (Fig. 1), ongoing contact between Taymyr and Anabar Dolgans, and a pattern of intermarriage with Taymyr women marrying Yuryung-Khaya men and moving to Yuryung-Khaya.

3.1 *Emergence of a Dolgan Ethnolinguistic Group*

Dolgan and Sakha comprise the northern branch of the northeastern Turkic languages; the two languages differ from the rest of the Turkic language family in retention of some archaic Turkic features, and in the contact effects from Mongolic and Tungusic languages (Johanson, 2021: 21–25). The ancestors of today's modern Dolgan and Sakha moved from their homeland in the Altay-Sayan region of Southern Siberia no earlier than the 13th century. This date is suggested by the fact that tales of Genghiz Khan's exploits can be found in Sakha epics (Johanson, 2021: 130; Kałużyński, 1961: 120), migrating northeast to the Lena Basin. Ultimately some of these peoples went northwest to the region of the Taymyr Basin where they encountered speakers of other languages, in particular Evenki (Tungusic) and Russian (Slavic), as well as speakers of Nenets, Enets and Nganasan (Uralic). Old Believer Russians fled from the west to the Taymyr Peninsula as well as further east, bringing a community of Russian speakers to the mix. These different groups were spread over the Taymyr Peninsula, along the Kheta and Khatanga rivers to the south and to Anabar region in the northeast. (See Däbritz, 2022: 9–16, for details and discussion.)

One contact variety which emerged in this region is Taymyr Pidgin Russian, or TPR (Stern, 2012). TPR was used for contact both between Russians and Indigenous groups, as well as between speakers of different Indigenous languages, living on the Taymyr Peninsula. The Sakha, Evenki, and Enets peoples lived in a kind of mutually beneficial relationship with Russian fur-hunters and settlers, from which a new ethnic group, the Dolgans, eventually emerged. In contrast, “the Nganasans kept aloof, thereby maintaining an ethnolinguistic divide, across which TPR was used well into the 20th century” (Stern, 2020). Dolgan was most probably first a desirable social status, rather than an ethnic identity, but developed over time to be distinguished from both Sakha and Evenki (Däbritz, 2022: 14; Stern, 2012: 123).

The sustained contact ecology over the course of more than 300 years produced the Dolgan language variety as the result of contact and convergence of Evenki speakers of different clans, Sakha, and the Tundra Russian Old Believers. Contact among the different groups was high and regular, and Sakha served as a local lingua franca (D'jačenko, 2005). Early records of Dolgan come from Boris Osipovich Dolgix's census expedition of 1926–1927. In January 1927, the expedition reached Khatanga; Dolgix noted that the Dolgan language as spoken in Khatanga differed from what he had heard in the more western region (Savolskul, 2005: 246, citing materials from the State Archive of Krasnoyarsk Territory, GAKK P769-1-306: 22v). At this time, the settlements were single or groups of nomadic households whose main occupation was reindeer herding, fur harvesting, and fishing (Filippova, 2020).

The 1926 Soviet census indicated a total of 656 Dolgans, but Dolgix estimated the population to be 4072 in his survey work of the same period and subsequently published in the 1960s (Dolgix, 1963). They were subsequently reclassified and incorporated into the Soviet censuses of 1939 and 1959 as ethnic Sakha. Nonetheless, the region (Russian *okrug*) received the name “Dolgan” in the 1930s, and in the 1950s the name Dolgan replaced Sakha in all official documents.

Thus, Dolgan identity and linguistic affiliation has been and continues to be a fraught question. Dolgan is often considered in juxtaposition to Sakha ethnolinguistic heritage: politically, socially, and even linguistically, Dolgan is defined with relation to Sakha and how it is similar or different. A theoretical framework of translocality captures the many senses in which Dolgan are defined by, and define themselves by, a deep interconnection with place and spatial geography, while also being migratory and highly mobile.

3.2 *Dolgan Linguistic Classification*

Determining whether Dolgan is a distinct language or a dialect of Sakha is a fraught question, one that cannot be answered solely on linguistic grounds but requires consideration of both social and political factors. Historically, the Dolgan language, like the ethnic group, was long classified by the Soviet scholars as a variety of Sakha. In a comprehensive analysis of phonetics, grammar, lexicon, and linguistic history of Dolgan as spoken in Norilsk, Ubrjatova (1985) reaches the conclusion that Dolgan is an independent language, although closely related to Sakha, both in the Northeastern subgroup of the Uigur-Oguz branch of Turkic languages. From the standpoint of language contact, the classification question is not compelling. It is clearly a contact variety of a Turkic language, with Tungusic (more specifically Evenki) and, to a lesser extent, Samoyedic substrate effects. Linguistically, it may be best seen as a dialect of Sakha, although it is more conservative than Sakha in many respects. Our research in the Anabar District indicates that it is mutually intelligible with Sakha, although only three people spoke what was locally recognized to be Taymyr Dolgan. Sociolinguistically, Dolgan is a distinct language; Stapert (2013: 63) reaches the same conclusion. It is linguistically more insightful to posit a continuum of Taymyr Dolgan – Anabar Dolgan – Northern Sakha – Standard Sakha. Speakers in the Anabar region have contact with northern Sakha varieties and the standard language (through media, school and speakers of the standard variety). In the Taymyr region, there is heavier contact with Russian and, to a lesser extent, Evenki. We met no Evenki speakers in our fieldwork.

The most comprehensive grammar of Modern Dolgan is Däbritz (2022), which is based on an analysis of corpus data, making it the most representa-

tive of Dolgan broadly speaking.⁴ This grammar is based on all Dolgan varieties except those spoken in the Anabar District, which was excluded due to a lack of material. Our fieldwork attempts to fill that gap.

Today, the state of the Dolgan and Evenki languages in these two villages of the Anabar District is quite complicated: there is visible language shift from Dolgan and Evenki to Sakha, first and foremost, and to Russian for a smaller group of people. Interestingly, in our fieldwork we found almost exclusively L1 Sakha speakers, and some, even younger people, had restricted functional knowledge of Russian, with primarily passive comprehension and limited production abilities. Many, however, claimed to speak a mixed language or their own language, distinguishing it from Sakha (and Russian).

We refer to the variety spoken in Saskylakh and Yuryung-Khaya as Anabar Dolgan, to differentiate it from the varieties spoken in the Taymyr District. Our research indicates that from a linguistic point of view, Anabar Dolgan is best considered a particular variety of Sakha, differing from what we identify as *Colloquial Sakha*, the spoken variety of the standard, written language. Anabar Dolgan exhibits some influence from Evenki, sharing some phonological and syntactic features of Taymyr Dolgan, but also uses features of northern Sakha dialects, in particular in terms of the lexicon. From a sociolinguistic standpoint, however, the Anabar variety is seen by local users as a different language and is a strong marker of identity.

In terms of the linguistic analysis, the challenge is sorting out which features are unique to Dolgan, which are part of northern Sakha, and which are due to more recent contact with Russian (since Taymyr Dolgan shows historical contact effects from the Tundra Russians living in the Taymyr District, and ongoing contact with Russian since the early Soviet period). Here we focus on phonology. For the speakers in Anabar, these are the most salient distinguishing features of their speech, although their interpretation of differences does not always correspond to actual linguistic origins. That is, they attribute differences between their speech and Colloquial Sakha as deriving from Taymyr Dolgan, but in fact their speech shares features with other northern Sakha varieties. Some lexical innovations are borrowings from Russian, adapted to Dolgan-Sakha phonology, and not from Taymyr Dolgan. The lexicon has been more thoroughly studied than other aspects of Anabar Dolgan and it is the most salient part of Anabar Dolgan for the speakers themselves. (See Filippova and Lavrenova, 2020; Filippova et al., 2020; and Malysheva et al., 2022.).

4 Li's (2011) grammar is based on elicitation data, working with 3 speakers over a total of only 5 days (Däbritz, 2022: 2). Ubryatova's (1985) grammar focuses on the language as spoken in Norilsk 40 years ago, so it does not reflect the current state of Dolgan.

TABLE 4 Native language of residents of Saskylakh and Yuryung-Khaya

RESPONDENTS (N= 50) by ethnic group	NATIVE LANGUAGE		
	Sakha 84%	Dolgan 30%	Evenki 2%
Dolgan	72%	57%	–
Even	91%	–	8%
Evenki	96%	–	3%
Sakha	–	2%	2%

4 Multilingualism in the Anabar District

The sociolinguistic survey we conducted in 2021 shows that Sakha is the primary language of local residents: 72% report it as their preferred language for communication. When asked to identify their native language (*Sah ije til* ‘mother tongue’) most respondents indicated more than one language, which also correlates with their choice of ethnicity depending on the ethnicity of their mother and father: a total of 84% of all respondents indicated Sakha as their native language; 30% indicated Dolgan, and 2% responded Evenki. Table 4 gives the responses for native language according to ethnic group. Note that these numbers are determined by self-assessment of the speakers.

The figures in Table 4 indicate that some speakers may identify two languages as native. 84% of all respondents declare Sakha as their mother tongue. This is particularly true of those who self-identify as Dolgan: note that 72% identify Sakha as their native language, and 57% identify Dolgan. Many people claimed two native languages, both Sakha and Dolgan, but based on our interviews it is clear that the respondents understand their native language as determined by ethnicity (their own or that of their parents) and not proficiency or knowledge of that language: they are Dolgan, and so their native language is Dolgan. If they have an Evenki parent, they might claim Evenki as one of their native languages. From these responses, we identify two independent variables: the level of linguistic assimilation and people’s commitment to their ethnicity. People’s commitment to language, expressed in knowledge of the language, is tantamount to a desire to emphasize one’s ethnic identity through the definition of “mother tongue” as a marker of ethnicity.

4.1 *The Dolgan Language in the Anabar District*

The Dolgan-Sakha variety spoken in the Anabar District, Anabar Dolgan, differs from both Standard Sakha and Dolgan language of the Taymyr Dolgan. To be clear, from a strictly linguistic viewpoint, it is a dialect of Sakha: we find no features of Dolgan that are not shared with some northern Sakha varieties. This does not mean that they are not characteristic of Dolgan, nor that they are not involved in social indexing, but rather that they are not unique to Anabar Dolgan. That said, speakers generally point to the lexicon as distinguishing Anabar Dolgan (Section 5.1), and this ideology ties the use of certain lexical items to Anabar Dolgan identity.

In this section, we outline a set of salient phonological differences⁵ between Anabar Dolgan and Colloquial Sakha based on an analysis of our recordings.

4.1.1 Word-Initial /s/ to /h/

The use of word-initial /h/ is a characteristic feature of Dolgan but is not, contra Däbritz (2022: 21), unique to it. It is a widespread change in Sakha dialects (Ivanov, 2021: 93) and common cross-linguistically: phonetically, the fricative spirant /s/ tends to change into pharyngeal /h/ in many languages (Ferguson, 1990; Miller, 2010: 177).

- (1) Change of word-initial inherited (Turkic) /s/ to /h/; Sakha preserves /s/:

Sakha	Anabar Dolgan	English
<i>sarın</i>	<i>hannı</i>	'shoulder'
<i>saxa</i>	<i>haka</i>	'Sakha' (ethnonym)
<i>saxalıı</i>	<i>haxalıı</i>	'in Sakha [language]'
<i>sıldzan</i>	<i>hıldza</i>	'being', 'being located'
<i>sin</i>	<i>hin</i>	'enough', 'sufficient'
<i>sir</i>	<i>hir</i>	'earth'
<i>soroχ</i>	<i>horoχ</i>	'some', 'another'
<i>suoχ</i>	<i>huoχ</i>	'no', negation
<i>süöhü</i>	<i>hüöhü</i>	'domestic animals'

5 We note that Stapert (2013: 336–338) provides a similar list of features for Taymyr Dolgan. Sakha and Dolgan are written in the Cyrillic alphabet. We use standard Turkic conventions for transliteration. Glossing follows the Leipzig Glossing Rules, available at (<https://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/pdf/Glossing-Rules.pdf>), with the addition of the following abbreviations: AUG = augmentative, INTENS = intensifier, NPST = non-past, POST = postposition, PTCL = particle, SIM = simulative; SIMUL.CVB = converb of simultaneity.

Contact with Even and Evenki is considered to be the source of the change (Ivanov, 2021: 93). Evenki dialects are typically categorized according to the reflexes of inherited *s, with the southern dialects showing [s] in all positions (*sulaki* ‘fox’; *asi* ‘woman’); eastern with [s] word-initially and /h/ intervocally (*sulaki*; *ahi*); and the northern uses [h] both word-initially and internally (*hulaki*; *ahi*) (Bulatova and Grenoble, 1998: 3). Speakers of northern Evenki dialects live in the northern regions of the Krasnoyarsk Territory, in the Taymyr District (Vasilevič, 1948: 12–13) and Evenki may well be the source of the change in Dolgan. Ubrjatova (1985: 32) notes that in Norilsk Dolgan, /h/ is found in words of Evenki origin, as *huge* ‘ax’, northern Evenki *huke*, standard Evenki *suke*, or Dolgan *hejkire* ‘juniper’, northern Evenki *hejkire*, standard Evenki *senjkire*.

Although the use of word-initial /h/ is strongly identified as a marker of Dolgan, it is not unique to Dolgan; it is quite typical of modern Sakha speakers living all over the Sakha Republic, with variation in the extent of the change in different varieties. From the standpoint of contact linguistics, this is not an unusual change, so it is not possible to claim unequivocally that it stems from contact. The change is, however, more prevalent in the northwestern dialect zone, especially in Essey, Olenëk, and Anabar dialects (Ivanov, 2004: 124). Historically, these territories were inhabited by Evenki, who spoke Ilimpeya dialect (Ivanov, 2021: 96). This suggests that even if the initial change was language-internal, it was supported by contact with local speakers of Evenki and is an areal feature.

4.1.2 Uvular Fricatives versus Velar Stops

The uvular fricative regularly found in Sakha is replaced by a velar stop in all positions, as in (2):

- (2) The uvular fricative /χ/ is replaced by /k/ in Anabar:

	Sakha	Anabar Dolgan	English
word-initial	<i>χomujaǰin</i>	<i>komujaǰin</i>	‘pick.PRS.2SG’
	<i>χorguj</i>	<i>korguj</i>	‘get hungry’
word-internal	<i>baraχsan</i>	<i>baraksan</i>	‘dear to the heart’
word-final	<i>ajmaχ</i>	<i>ajmak</i>	‘relative’
	<i>battaχ</i>	<i>battak</i>	‘hair’
	<i>elbeχ</i>	<i>elbek</i>	‘many’

(cont.)

Sakha	Anabar Dolgan	English
<i>iskeyχ</i>	<i>istek</i>	'caviar'
<i>süreχ</i>	<i>hürek</i>	'heart'

In Taymyr Dolgan, /χ/ is maintained, as in the negative element, phonetically [huoχ]. Note, however, that the merger of /χ/ is not unique to Anabar but is found in some northern Sakha dialects. Moreover, there is variation in Anabar Dolgan, and the change is not absolute, as seen in the examples *horoχ* 'some', *huoχ* 'not' and *haxalü* 'in Sakha' in example (1), with in word-finally and medially.

This change appears to be the effect of Evenki substrate in Sakha and is characteristic of Evenki speakers who also speak Sakha. It is a regular and long-standing change in Evenki-Sakha, with the uvular fricative /χ/ usually replaced by /k/ in all positions (Romanova et al., 1975: 79). For native (L1) Sakha speakers this phonological difference often marks a northern dialect. Dialect maps show scattered isoglosses, but mostly this transition takes place in northwestern dialect zone (Ivanov, 2004: 123). Thus, the change of /χ/ to /k/ is characteristic of Anabar Dolgan but not exclusive to it.

In Taymyr Dolgan, Pakendorf and Stapert (2020: 433) state that [χ] occurs before and after low back vowels, whereas in Sakha it is found before low back vowels but postvocally occurs after all low vowels. Däbritz (2022: 38) argues for allophonic variation, as [huok] – [huoq] – [huok^x] – [huox] in his corpus.

4.1.3 Word-Initial Velar Stops

Another change is the voicing of the velar stop in word-initial position in some words, with examples in (3):

(3) Voicing of word-initial /k/ in some words:

Sakha	Anabar Dolgan	English
<i>kini</i>	<i>gini</i>	'he/she/it' (3SG)
<i>kiene</i>	<i>giene</i>	'his/her/its' (3SG.POSS)
<i>kiniler</i>	<i>ginner</i>	'they' (3PL)

This change is also found in Taymyr Dolgan; Däbritz (2022: 38) notes that both /k/ and /g/ occur as phonemes and contrast in word- and syllable-initial position, with [g] almost exclusively found intervocalically and [k] word- and syllable-finally. He cites the example of the third person singular pronoun, *gini*. This is a shared feature of Anabar and Taymyr Dolgan, but not exclusive to them, as pronouns in *g-* are also found in Sakha dialects. The standard language uses the forms in *k-* as provided in (3).

4.1.4 Voiced Velar Fricatives

Another sound change found in Anabar Dolgan is the change of the voiced velar fricative to a stop, as seen in (4):

- (4) Loss of the fricative /ɣ/ (orthographic ğ), which is replaced by /g/:

Sakha	Anabar Dolgan	English
<i>alġaa</i>	<i>algaa</i>	'to bless'
<i>sahardaġina</i>	<i>heherdegine</i>	'when smth. becomes yellow'
<i>tajaġi</i>	<i>tajagi</i>	'moose.ACC'

The changes in (3) and (4) of the uvular fricative /χ/ and the velar fricative /ɣ/ to velar plosives /k/ and /g/ are features of a Northern Sakha dialects. According to Ivanov (2004: 34), these changes are more prominent in the Essey, Olenëk, Anabar and Zhigansk-Bulun dialects. Ubryatova notes that the change of /ɣ/ to /g/ is also a result of Evenki influence (Ubryatova, 1960: 82). So, while we can possibly assess these changes as due to contact effects, they are not unique to Anabar Dolgan.

4.1.5 Vowel Harmony

Vowel harmony is robust in Sakha; a distinguishing feature of the language is that it “exhibits the most developed intersyllabic harmony system within the [Turkic] family” (Johanson, 2021: 315). This is true of the standard language and all known dialects. Vowel harmony operates in the domain of the phonological word, and the vowel in the first syllable determines vowel quality in the rest of the word according to two basic parameters, the feature [±round] and [±front], referred to respectively as labial harmony and palatal harmony (Johanson, 2021: 304–313, 315–316). In Sakha, labial harmony is robust and applies to [+low] vowels, in distinction to many other Turkic languages.

In contrast, Anabar Dolgan does not always follow the rules of vowel harmony as in (5):

(5) Vowel harmony in Sakha and Anabar Dolgan

Sakha	Anabar Dolgan	English
<i>börönü</i>	<i>böröni</i>	'wolf.ACC'
<i>kirgittar</i>	<i>kirgittar</i>	'girls'
<i>sarsiarda</i>	<i>harsierda</i>	'in the morning'
<i>učuutal</i>	<i>učital</i>	'teacher'

The Sakha words given in (5) adhere to the rules of vowel harmony. In *börönü*, for example, the [+round] stem vowel [ö] is followed by [+round] suffix vowels, [ü], but Anabar Dolgan shows a [-round] vowel in the suffix ([i]). The use of i [i] instead of i [u] is most likely due to the fact that these are not phonemically distinct in either Evenki and or in the Northwestern dialects of Sakha (Ivanov, 2021: 68).

Less rigid adherence to vowel harmony is a feature that clearly distinguishes Dolgan in general, including Anabar Dolgan, from Sakha. Pakendorf and Stappert (2020: 433) similarly note that vowel harmony applies strictly in Sakha, but that (Taimyr) Dolgan allows some exceptions. In Anabar Dolgan there are many exceptions. This is in direct contrast to Colloquial Sakha which strictly follows the rules of vowel harmony. We need acoustic studies of vowel harmony in Anabar and Taimyr Dolgan, and in northern Sakha dialects, to understand how these varieties are alike or differ. (See also Däbritz, 2022: 55, who similarly points to the need for acoustic and articulatory studies of vowel harmony for Dolgan.)

4.1.6 Phonotactics and Loanword Phonology

One aspect of words borrowed from Russian into Anabar Dolgan is that some of the words are adapted to Anabar Dolgan phonology, and others are only partially adapted. This is seen even in the case of loanword phonology, as in the borrowing Sakha *učuutal* from Russian *učitel'* in (5), where the Russian vowel [i] in the second syllable is changed to [-front], or [u], in keeping with the rules of palatal harmony. In the Anabar Dolgan form *učital*, the original vowel [i] is maintained.

Other examples include *biilka* < R *vilka* 'fork', where Russian word-initial /v/ is realized as /b/ in Anabar Dolgan, but otherwise the only difference is the lengthening of the vowel in the first syllable. Since this syllable is stressed in Russian, it is predictably longer than the unstressed vowel in the second syllable. Similarly, Anabar Dolgan *praaznik* (<R *prazdnik* 'holiday') shows vowel

lengthening in the stressed syllable and simplification of the Russian consonant cluster /zdn/. But neither *biilka* nor *praaznik* conform to the rules of vowel harmony, where we would expect either all front vowels, which would produce *biilke*, cf. Sakha *biikke*, or all back vowels (as in standard Sakha *biraahinn'ik* 'holiday'). Both borrowings exhibit only partial phonological adaptation. In Taimyr Dolgan, vowel harmony is not systematic in loanwords as in the rest of the lexicon and is sometimes completely absent. Taimyr Dolgan similarly shows considerable variation in loanword phonology (Däbritz, 2022: 512–513).

This kind of phonological variation is typical of Anabar Dolgan. This variation stems not only from the fact that Dolgan emerged as a contact variety, but also because in Anabar its speakers are in contact with Sakha, both standard Sakha (as taught in the schools) and local, northern Sakha dialects.

5 Translocality and Dolgan Identity

Two points clearly emerge from our research. First, there is a strong sense of Dolgan identity in the Anabar District. Second, speakers associate language with this identity, and their concept of their language is closely tied to a sense of a mixed language. They differentiate Dolgan and Sakha, and see themselves as speaking a special contact variety, “mixed” and unique to the Anabar District. Elements of this local variety that are not found in Modern Sakha are seen as features of Dolgan. In fact, the phonological features identified here are not unique to Dolgan, with the exception of the weakening of vowel harmony in Anabar. This is also a trait of Taimyr Dolgan (Pakendorf and Stapert, 2020: 433) but is not known to occur in any Sakha dialects. Partial loss of vowel harmony is a marker of Dolgan.

We interviewed a relatively balanced group of participants, aiming for representation across genders and all age groups (Table 3). Of the more than 40 questions of the sociolinguistic questionnaire we used, in the present discussion we focus on the following issues and questions:

1. the ethnicity (Russian *nacional'nost'*) or ethnic background of respondents and their parents: “What is your ethnicity?” and “What is the ethnicity of your mother/father?”
2. mother tongue and the degree of proficiency in other languages: “Which languages do you speak fluently?”, “What is your mother/first language?”, “What language(s) do you speak at home?”
3. more general background information: “Where do you live?”, “Where did you grow up?”

In response to questions concerning ethnicity and self-identity, our respondents in Yuryung-Khaya identified themselves as Dolgans – 17 people (68%), 1 person (4%) as a Dolgan according to their passport, 1 person (4%) as a Dolgan but actually an Evenk, 2 people (8%) as a Dolgan according to their passport but actually a Sakha, 1 person (4%) as a Sakha and 4 people (16%) as Sakha. It is worth noting that only those who come from other regions of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) consider themselves fully Sakha.

The situation in Saskylakh differs from Yuryung-Khaya. We found greater ethnic diversity across our respondents in Saskylakh, which reflects the different demographics (Tab. 2 and 3). Half of our consultants identify as Dolgan-Sakha, and the other half as Indigenous minorities (Even, Evenki and 1 Yukaghir). This diversity is most probably due to the fact that Saskylakh is the administrative center of the Anabar District, and Dolgans from Yuryung-Khaya, “Saskylakh-Evenki” live here, along with many other groups who have immigrated from other parts of the Sakha Republic. For example, 2 ethnic Evens in our group had moved to Saskylakh from the Kobyaysky District (in the center of the Sakha Republic). But an additional factor may play a role here. For many people, there is a dissonance between their actual ethnicity and official government identity (*po pasportu* ‘according to the passport’). The Evenki we interviewed do not speak Evenki but rather Sakha (L1 and dominant), and Russian (L2). Nonetheless, several proudly came to meet us in their traditional, ethnic clothing. As for those who self-identify as Dolgan, their attitudes toward the Dolgan language and proficiency levels match those of the Dolgan living in Yuryung-Khaya. Their primary language is Sakha, and they speak Dolgan at best rarely, using only isolated Dolgan lexical items. For this reason, we focus on a close analysis of the survey results in Yuryung-Khaya, which is identified by residents as a Dolgan village and has the densest Dolgan population.

Although the survey sample is small, the results match our independent conclusions based on our more casual conversations with members of both communities and the administrators in the two villages who did not directly participate in the study. Thus, we consider our respondents to be representative of the larger local population. Of the 25 people interviewed in Yuryung-Khaya, 70% identify themselves as Dolgan, and quite confidently. Yet when it comes to the question “What is your primary language?”, they begin to have doubts. Of the 17 people self-identifying as Dolgan, 10 chose Sakha, and only 7 (less than half) identified Dolgan as their first/native language. But even among these 7 people, only 3 confidently consider Dolgan to be their native language. And these 3 are the women who married into the community, moving to Yuryung-Khaya from the Taimyr region. They acutely feel the differences not only between the

Dolgan and Sakha languages, but also between the Dolgan as spoken in Anabar and Dolgan in Taimyr.

In contrast to the Taimyr Dolgans we interviewed, the Yuryung-Khaya group has obvious difficulties in defining the status of Dolgan as a separate language, as well as the boundaries between when they speak Sakha and when they speak Dolgan. During the interviews we were interested in their opinion on this issue and asked clarifying questions that went beyond the original questionnaire. Their responses can be divided into four categories according to the attitude of the Dolgans themselves to this question: (1) Yuryung-Khaya Dolgan: this is a matter of individual words (7 people expressed this opinion); (2) Yuryung-Khaya Dolgan is similar to Sakha (4 people); (3) Yuryung-Khaya Dolgan is a mixed language (4 people); and (4) Yuryung-Khaya Dolgan is a dialect of the Sakha language (2 people). We consider each of these responses separately:

5.1 *Yuryung-Khaya Dolgan Is a Matter of Individual Words*

This idea of “individual words” refers to the fact that many Dolgans see their speech as differing from Sakha because they use certain lexical items not found in Sakha, but generally they refer to this as the use of *kibitik tillar* (‘insertion words’), or specifically they say *dolganskaj tillar kibillan biereller* (‘Dolgan words are inserted [into speech]’), referring to various lexical units inserted into the general flow of Sakha (or, rather, Sakha-Russian) speech. Thus, the most popular opinion among the Yuryung-Khaya Dolgans may be the perception of Dolgan as separate lexemes or derivational affixes, usually of Russian and Evenki origin, differing from the “standard” Sakha variants. When asked to give examples of such words, the words *teete* ‘father’ (from Ru *tjatja*, instead of Sah *ağa*) and *uruuka* ‘mittens’ (from Ru *ruka* ‘hand’, instead of Sakha *ütülük*) were most often named. Several people cited the adjectives *behelee* ‘cheerful’ (instead of Sah *behielej*, also from Ru *veselyj*), and *baskuoj* ‘beautiful’ noted by Stapert (2013: 153), Russian dialect form *baskuoj* ‘beautiful’, instead of Sah *kirahiabaj* (from Ru *krasivj*). The loanword shows that Dolgan “uses copies of older dialectal Russian terms, whereas Sakha uses words from modern, literary Russian” (Stapert, 2013: 153).

The second group consists of lexical borrowings from Evenki. These words are primarily related to reindeer herding, but in our interviews few people offered specific examples, presumably because most reindeer herders were living with the herds outside of the village at that time of our fieldwork and we were unable to speak with them. In conversation, especially the older generation occasionally uses the diminutive suffix *-kaan* in Sakha words such as *soğotoχχoon* ‘lonely’ (from Sakha *soğotoχ* ‘one, lonely’), and *ïaraχan soğusχaan* ‘heavy, complicated’ from Sah *soğus* (a particle denoting weak expression of

some quality, attribute) + *-kaan*. This suffix is borrowed from Tungusic (Evenki and Even) and is widely used in Sakha.

5.2 *Yuryung-Khaya Dolgan Is Similar to Sakha*

4 respondents said that *dolganskaj sin bür saçalii kurduk* ('Dolgan is still like Sakha'). A linguistic analysis of this response shows just how complicated it is sociopragmatically. There was phonetic variation in their use of the Sakha expression 'all the same, in any case, without difference': *sin bür*, *sim bür*, and *him bür* were used. At the same time, they did not really mean to say Anabar Dolgan and Sakha are entirely 'without difference' as the particle *kurduk* 'as if, like', is used to compare similar but not identical things.

So as to provide a broader context for understanding the stance of the local (Yuryung-Khaya) Dolgans themselves, our analysis includes the opinions of newcomers from other regions of Yakutia. They proved especially insightful because their background allows them to see more clearly the peculiarities of the Yuryung-Khaya variety as compared to their own dialects. These newcomers also identified Dolgan as a language similar to Sakha (4 people).

5.3 *Yuryung-Khaya Dolgan Is a Mixed Language*

The view that Dolgan is a mixed language was another common opinion among our respondents. 4 people characterized Dolgan using the adjectives Ru *smešannyj* ('mixed') and Sah *butullubut, bulkullubut* 'confused/mixed'. Example (13) in Section 5.4 provides an illustration of this discourse, with the speaker using this term to describe his language. And indeed, historically this is true, as the Dolgan language emerged as a result of mixing three languages, Sakha, Evenki and Russian. This is felt by the Yuryung-Khayans as well, although they do not always understand the origin of 'Dolgan' words. See examples (7)–(16) for illustrations of these attitudes.

5.4 *Yuryung-Khaya Dolgan Is a Dialect of the Sakha Language*

This is the opinion, for example, of our valued respondent, Aksinya Egorovna Spiridonova, one of the author-compilers of the *Dictionary of the Yuryung-Khaya Dolgan dialect* (Spiridonova and Spiridonov, 2001). As someone who has been studying her native speech for several years, she concludes that Dolgan is a regional dialect of Sakha language. And in the introduction to their dictionary, Spiridonova and Spiridonov highlight the peculiarities of the Yuryung-Khaya dialect. Their analysis mostly coincides with our own observations, such as the occurrence of word-initial /h/ instead of /s/, /g/ instead of /k/, and the prevalence of Russian borrowings and calques in the speech of Taimyr Dolgans.

This leads to the central question: if Anabar Dolgan, in the opinion of the majority of Anabar Dolgans themselves, is a close dialect of the Sakha language, then what allows the Yuryung-Khayans to confidently consider themselves Dolgan and not Sakha? To answer this question, we turn to our sociolinguistic interviews and conversations with respondents, and to our semantic analysis of the Yuryung-Khaya Dolgan dictionary, dividing words and expressions into several thematic groups: (1) reindeer and reindeer husbandry; (2) everyday life; (3) hunting; (4) nature; (5) animals and plants; and (6) attributes describing a person, among others. Our conclusion is that the sense of Dolgan identity comes from a combination of three factors. The first is historical and involves official ethnic classification. The second is cultural, and the continuation of traditional culture and lifestyle. And third is an attachment to and sense of place. We discuss each of these separately.

First, Dolgan identity is to a great extent influenced by historical practices: ethnicity was officially indicated in the government-issued identity documents. To contextualize this, it is important to know that indigeneity is an official category defined at the level of the federal government (first Soviet and then Russian). Indigenous is a term used to refer to peoples whose total population is less than 50,000. The government maintains a list of officially recognized indigenous groups, and it is the government which determines not only the classification as indigenous, but also whether closely related groups and linguistic varieties comprise a single category or two separate ones. Dolgans were classified as Sakha in the 1926 census, but subsequently were reclassified as a distinct people (and language).

From the Soviet period until 2017, indigenous peoples received a special insert in their passports, which served as official verification of the holder's authenticity as belonging to the official category of indigenous peoples. Since 2017, the issuance of inserts has been suspended and replaced by entry into the register of persons belonging to small indigenous minorities of the Russian Federation. However, to this day people retain the concept of ethnicity (*Ru nacional'nost'*) "according to the passport", which is why, when asked "What is your ethnicity" and "Nationality of mother/father?", respondents repeatedly emphasized that they are Dolgan according to their passports. 3 people explicitly responded that their nationality according to their passport and their actual ethnicity differ: according to their passport they are Dolgan, but in fact, they are Evenk or Sakha. This underscores the fact that official census data do not always reflect the realities on the ground and reinforces the need for in-depth, open-ended interviews and data collection in the places where indigenous groups live. Despite these discrepancies, for the majority of the interviewees, official confirmation, recognition as Dolgans, seems to give them confidence in self-identification and self-expression.

Second, a strong sense of Dolgan identity stems from the fact that residents of Yuryung-Khaya have maintained reindeer herding, traditional economy and way of life, as attested in the narratives of our respondents. Aksinya Spiridonova, lead author of the dictionary, mentioned in her interview that much that is related to reindeer herding and a nomadic lifestyle is central to the Dolgans and the Dolgan language. This stems from the fact that as their predecessors adopted reindeer herding activities from the Evenki clans, Evenki terminology for reindeer herding was naturally borrowed into (what was at the time) Sakha, along with other terminology for hunting and a nomadic lifestyle. By way of contrast, the Sakha are settled, not nomadic, and have engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry for centuries. Close contact with Evenki populations affected the culture and language of the formerly Sakha peoples of the Taimyr region.

An analysis of the dictionary entries in Spiridonova and Spiridonov (2001) shows that the most numerous in number are the groups of lexemes are related to reindeer and reindeer herding (more than 150 words), hunting and fishing (more than 20), as well as household items (120). Russianisms are also found in these semantic categories, similarly due to close contact with the Russian-speaking population living in Siberia. Another respondent noted that he speaks more Dolgan when he is with the herd, i.e., when he is engaged in reindeer herding.⁶ Preservation of the traditional way of life, especially reindeer herding, is very important for the Dolgans and is a key factor in their self-identification as Dolgans. This matches the findings of Filippova et al. (2021), who surveyed 201 residents of the Anabar District. In response to the question of what determines their nationality, the respondents replied as follows: culture and traditions – 60.2%, native language – 26.9%, history and territory – 10.4%.

The third reason is related to attachment to a place – to nature, to their village, district, and to their physical isolation from the majority of Sakha, Evenk, and Russian populations. When speaking about the Dolgan people, and about the Dolgan language, almost every interviewee used the spatial adjectives *mannaaǰı*, *mannaaŋŋi* ‘local’ (*mannaaǰı*, *mannaaŋŋi til* ‘local language’) and the deictic adverb *manna* ‘here’. Their sense of isolation and distinction is expressed in the possessive pronoun *bejebit* ‘our’ (*bejebit tilbit* ‘our language’). This strong attachment to place (with the opposition between local and not

6 This echoes what Evenki say about the use of their language: you speak Evenki when herding, and even that is not possible to herd reindeer in another language. Such claims were frequently heard from Evenki during fieldwork conducted by Nadezhda Bulatova and Lenore Grenoble in the late 1990s in the southern region of the Sakha Republic and in the Amur Oblast.

local), isolation and distinction (as one's own – not one's own) means that many of the speakers in our study identify themselves as part of their locale. This is clear in their answers to questions about their own linguistic repertoire, that of their parents and neighbors, and in their discussions of their own identity. Excerpts from one interview are provided in (7)–(13) to illustrate this claim.

Background: The interviewer (AT) is a member of our team and conducted the interview in Sakha. The speaker, Nikolaj, was born in 1962 in Saskylakh. His mother considered herself to be a Saskylakh Evenki and died when he was 3 years old, and his father was from Yuryung-Khaya.

(7) Interview with Nikolaj

AT: *What languages do you speak?*

N: Min otto ol beje-bit ere til-bit
 1SG well DEM our-REFL.1PL only language-POSS.1PL
 buol-lağ-a, saɣa-lii buol-lağ-a,
 be-ASSUM.PROB-3SG Sakha-SIM be-ASSUM.PROB-3SG
 osnovuj-but
 main-POSS.1PL
 'Well, I only speak our/my own [language], basically, it's like Sakha,
 our main [language].'

Of particular interest here is the word *bejebit* which is the personal reflexive pronoun. Its meaning is ambiguous in this context. It can be translated as 'my own' or 'our own'; since it stands in the 1st person plural form, the meaning is like 'our own', indexing not the speaker's own individual or idiosyncratic speech but rather that of the local place. That is, it indexes a tie with the locality and the other residents of this space. Yet when asked about his ethnicity, he replies as in (8):

(8) AT: *Are you (ethnically) Sakha?*

N: Dolgan dzie-n.
 Dolgan call-3SG
 'Dolgan, it's called.'

The interviewer continues to ask:

(9) AT: *All these Dolgans came here, but they all speak Sakha*

N: Honnuk.
 EMPH.such
 'That's right.'

(10) AT: *They say they don't know Dolgan.*

N: Huoχ buo.

no AUG

'No, of course.'

(11) AT: *They don't know it all?*

N: Otto hin.

Well fairly

'Well, a bit.'

(12) AT: *Why do you think that is?*

N: Aǰijax til-i hin bil-ebin.

little language-ACC fairly know-NPST.1SG

'I know just a few words.'

(13) AT: *Ah, you know a few words?*

N: Bihiene otto butul-lu-but-a da bert

POSS.1PL but mix-PASS-PST-3SG PTCLAUG PTCLAUG

N: Mannik dzij-neeχ saxa til-a manna baar

like real-ADJ Sakha language-POSS.3SG here be.PRS

'Ours is too confused/mixed. Like, so, there's real Sakha language here.'

In (13) *butullubuta* can be interpreted as 'mixed' or 'confused', and both meanings are appropriate in this context. The speaker here distinguishes this mixed variety from "real" Sakha, and his assessment is typical of other consultants, many of whom also said that they speak a mixed language, or their own (idiosyncratic) speech (Ru *na svoëm jazyke*).

As noted, the people we interviewed have a strong sense of ethnic identity and many have acute metalinguistic awareness, distinguishing between Sakha, "Krasnoyarsk" (or Taimyr Dolgan) and "our" Dolgan. The awareness of Taimyr Dolgan as different is fueled by ongoing immigration of speakers from Taimyr, in particular women, who marry local men and move to Yuryung-Khaya. They recognize differences between local speech and, at the same time, tend to show heavy code-mixing with Russian. The two varieties of Dolgan differ primarily in terms of ongoing, sustained contact with Russian in the Taimyr District, and with Sakha in the Anabar district.

To illustrate the differences, we provide an excerpt of an interview with a recent immigrant to Yuryung-Khaya from Taimyr, Larisa. Larisa herself notes that she understands Sakha and, indeed, is quite fluent in Sakha. However, her

speech exhibits more Russian words than that of the local Anabar Dolgans, as expected from Taimyr Dolgan where there is heavier contact with Russian, and more Russian influence.

Background: Larisa is originally from the village of Syndassko (Khatanga region, Taimyr Dolgan-Nenetsk District, see Figure 1) and who moved to Yuryung-Khaya after her marriage. Larisa grew up in the tundra with her family herding reindeer, a traditional lifestyle generally associated with retention of Dolgan. The interviewer (AT) is fluent in Sakha but switches to Russian as the consultant switches. She discusses her parents' multilingual repertoires, noting that her father (from the Taimyr District) speaks Taimyr Dolgan, Anabar Dolgan, Sakha, and Russian. Her mother (born in Yuryung-Khaya) uses all four languages as well, although her mother's first (primary, best) language is Anabar Dolgan, while her father's first language is Taimyr Dolgan. But they mix all of them, as she states in response to the interviewer (AT) in (14):

(14) Language mixing

AT 1 Üs tilinan ol aata bukkuja **sañarallar**
 üs til-inan ol aata bukkuj-a **sañar-al-lar**
 three language-INS thus mix-SIMUL.CVB speak-PRS-3PL
 'They speak, mixing up three languages.'

Lar 2 Mmm, bukkuja **hañarallar**, *i na russkom tože*.
 Mmm bukkuj-a **hañar-al-lar**, *i na russkom*
 mmm mix- SIMUL.CVB speak-PRS-3PL and in Russian-PREP
 tože
 also
 'Mhmm, mixing up three languages, *and in Russian too*.'

Note that in line 2 Larisa responds to the interviewer's question in Sakha with the form *sañarallar* 'they speak' by using the Dolgan/Northern Sakha *hañarallar*, exhibiting the expected change of /s/ > /h/ discussed in (1). She switches to Russian after the verb; heavy code-mixing is typical of her speech and distinguishes it from the Anabar Dolgan.

Larisa confidently distinguishes between Sakha and Dolgan, as well as differentiating what she calls Krasnoyarsk and Yuryung-Khaya Dolgan dialects. When asked "What languages do you speak?", she answers: "Dolgan and Russian." When asked which Dolgan variety she speaks, she answers: "In Krasnoyarsk, in Krasnoyarsk [Taimyr] Dolgan." She uses the pronoun Dlg/Sah *bu* 'this' in the sense of 'this, the Anabar Dolgan' in distinction to *bihigi* 'we, Taimyr Dolgans', as in (15). Russian is italicized:

- (15) Bu Ürüŋ-χaja *jazīg-in* öjdüübüt bihigi. *Ponimaem.*
 bu Ürüŋ-χaja *jazīg-in* öjdüü-büt bihigi.
 this Yuryung-khaya language-ACC understand-NPST.2PL 1PL
ponimaem.
 understand-PRS.1PL
 ‘We understand this Yuryung-Khaya language. *We understand.*’

Here the speaker explicitly positions herself with other Dolgans from the Krasnoyarsk Region in opposition to the Dolgans in Yuryung-Khaya. Larisa’s speech shows strong influence from Russian, in terms of code-mixing, as in Ru *ponimaem* ‘we understand’ in (15), repeating the Dolgan/Sakha verb in of the prior sentence (Dlg/Sah *öjdüübüt*), and in use of the Russian borrowing *jazyk* ‘language’ in *jazīg-in* ‘language-ACC.POSS.3SG’ instead of the native (Sakha) word *til-in* ‘language-ACC.POSS.3SG’.

A lengthier excerpt is provided in (16), where Larisa shows metalinguistic awareness of the differences between Taimyr and Anabar Dolgan varieties and uses a considerable amount of Russian. This use of Russian was typical for Dolgan speakers like Larisa who had moved from the Taimyr to the Anabar District. Local residents of both Saskylakh and Yuryung-Khaya use little to no Russian in their speech; Nikolaj’s speech in (7)–(13) is representative. He uses no Russian here (although he does subsequently speak Russian). Larisa responds to the Sakha interview questions in Russian, causing the interviewer to switch in line 3:

(16) Interview with Larisa

AT 1 Otto *vy svobodno* xannik tilinan saŋarağitij?
 otto *vy svobodno* xannik til-inan saŋar-ağit-ij
 then 2PL fluently which language-INS speak-NPST.2PL-Q
 ‘And *you fluently* speak which language?’

Lar 2 *Svobodno na dolganskom*
svobodno na dolgansk-om
 fluently in Dolgan-PREP
 ‘*Fluently in Dolgan.*’

AT 3 *Na kakom dolganskom?*
na kak-om dolgansk-om
 in which-PREP Dolgan-PREP
 ‘In which kind of Dolgan?’

- Lar 4 Krasnojarsk
'Krasnoyarsk.'
- AT 5 *Krasnojarskij na pervom meste, a na vtorom meste ...*
Krasnoyarsk na perv-om mest-e a na vtor-om
Krasnoyarsk in 1ST-PREP place-PREP and in 2ND-PREP
mest-e
place-PREP
'Krasnoyarsk is in first place, and in second place ...'
- Lar 6 **Badzeki** vot ... Ürüñ-Xaja
Badzeki vot Ürüñ-Xaja
Badzeki this Yuryung-Khaya'
'Badzeki this Yuryung-Khaya.'
- AT 7 *Vy nazyvaete badzeki? Badzeki dien tuguj?*
Vy nazyva-ete badzeki Badzeki dien tug-uj?
2PL call-PRS.2PL badzeki badzeki say-POST what-Q
'You call it badzeki? Badzeki, what is that?'
- Lar 8 *Imeju v vidu, badzeki dien bu ürüñ-χaja-lar. Dolganskij.*
imej-u v vid-u bu ürüñ-χaja-lar
have-PRS.1SG in sight-PREP this Yuryung-Khaya-PL
Dolganskij.
Dolgan
'I mean, badzeki that's, well, these Yuryung-Khayans. Dolgan.'

In (16) the speaker shows acute awareness of the different lects at play: Dolgan, *badzeki*, Sakha (used by both speakers here), and of course Russian. The use of the word *badzeki* (line 6) is an interesting example of language contact and attitudes toward the language variety it indexes. When asked what *badzeki* means, the speaker responds using the nominative plural form of the name of the village (*ürüñ-χaja-lar* 'Yuryung-Khaya-NOM.PL'), suggesting it refers to the residents of the village, but this is followed by the Russian adjective *dolgan-skij* 'Dolgan-NOM.M.SG', which – based on context – agrees with the elided Russian word *jazyk* 'language'. It indexes the Yuryung-Khaya Dolgans and/or the Anabar Dolgan language, referring to them and their language as from this place. We construct this as a borrowing from Evenki, related to Evenki *bidzek* 'a place where one lived formerly' (Boldyrev, 2000: 68–69; Cincius, 1975: 79). When asked, Larisa explains that she means a specific Yuryung-Khaya Dolgan

variety (line 8), distinguishing it from her own Taimyr variety. After this excerpt, in answering the interviewer's questions, she continues to explain that *badzeki* is a term that the local people understand and use.

6 Conclusion: Identity in Translocal Communities

Both Saskylakh and Yuryung-Khaya are small-scale societies, with populations of 2424 and 1217, respectively. They are remote and isolated from one another; there are no year-round roads connecting the two and travel between the two requires a long (7–9 hour) boat trip up the river in warmer months and a snowmobile trip when the river is frozen. Saskylakh, as the administrative center of the Anabar District, is less isolated but outside visitors are largely limited to people involved in the diamond mines. Historically, Dolgan in the Taimyr Peninsula came as the result language contact across speakers of at least three different languages – Evenki, Russian and Sakha – and for some period there were probably speakers with command of 3 or 4 of them. In a review of the 1926–1927 census, Ziker (2013) shows how complicated the ties are between language and ethnicity. In one family, the husband (Mikhail Isakovich Suslov, or more commonly known simply as Monto) spoke Dolgan, but was officially classified as “Khtainski Samoyed,” an odd classification, as people in this region were generally officially classified as Khatainski Evenki, while the Nganasan (Samoyedic) population lived further north. His wife (Elena Ivanovna) is listed as Tungus, a term usually used to refer to Evenki at the time. When Ziker conducted fieldwork in 1994, he came across an elderly woman who told the story of her Nganasan uncle Monto, who was clearly the same man. She spoke of how he was orphaned while young, ran away and joined a Dolgan settlement, and adopted Christianity. Ziker cites this story to illustrate the complex nature of Dolgan identity as involving, historically and today, interethnic marriage, settlement, and administrative reclassification (Ziker, 2013: 226–227). This is strikingly similar to the situation we find in the Anabar District today, where our consultants sometimes responded to questions about ethnicity by reporting that their parents' ethnicity, and what was in their own passport. For example, one person in Saskylakh reported that her parents were Evenki, but her own passport listed her as Dolgan.

The Dolgan language itself is the result not only contact but also shift, with ethnic Evenki shifting to Sakha. This suggests imbalanced bilingualism, and is more the norm for Russia and Eurasia, where there was and is a social hierarchy of languages in those areas that were (or are) multilingual. This social hierarchy is supported by the hypothesis that Dolgan was initially a high social

status, not an ethnic identity per se (Stern, 2012: 263–268; see also Däbritz, 2022: 14–15). (For a discussion of more recent sociolinguistic status in the area, see Siegl, 2013, who argues for a local dominance of Dolgan in parts of the region).

In the Anabar District, many of the speakers have knowledge of the local Anabar Dolgan, Sakha, and Russian. A few also have knowledge of Taimyr Dolgan. They view themselves as multilingual. Although we did not conduct proficiency tests, few appeared to be balanced bilinguals, and all of those we interviewed were dominant in one or another language; we have no grounds to claim balanced bilingualism in the population. There is metalinguistic awareness of different codes, and of their use in different settings. Our linguistic analysis shows the features identified in (1)–(6) are highly emblematic of the local speech variety. In our recordings we find variation both across speakers and in the speech of a single individual, in a single recording. Whether this variation has social meaning is an open question, as is the question as to whether they have been enregistered as emblematic (Agha, 2005). The speakers view themselves as having multilingual repertoires, use different lects with different interlocutors. The strong sense of identity is attached not only to ethnicity, but also to place, and in this sense they are translocal, with the Dolgan identity being fueled and renewed by contact with Taimyr Dolgans, and the immigration of Dolgans from the Taimyr to Anabar.

It is also difficult to hierarchize the different lects we have identified. Anabar Dolgan has high local prestige, and Taimyr Dolgan has high prestige with respondents from the Taimyr District. There is a strong sense of Dolgan identity linked to place of origin and language. Survey data from 2003 show that 72% of Dolgan identified themselves as belonging to a specific regional group, divided into lower, upper, middle, and western (or Avamsk) (Krivonogov, 2013: 873). Our consultants did not speak about the divisions identified by Krivonogov. This may be because he conducted his survey in the Taimyr District and the differences are not salient in the Anabar district, or perhaps the categories have changed over the last 20 years, or perhaps because of differences in survey methods. Yet we did find a strong sense of ethnic identity and pride. Our respondents defined themselves as Dolgan, or as Krasnoyarsk Dolgan in contrast to Yuryung-Khaya Dolgan, as represented in Larisa's discussion in (16)–(17). Similarly, local Yuryung-Khaya Dolgans distinguished people from Krasnoyarsk. Identity is linked to both ethnicity and place. All people who self-identified as Dolgan see themselves as ethnically distinct from the Sakha people; this is in keeping with Krivonogov's findings that in 2013 70.9% of respondents considered the two groups to be different, an increase from 67.2% in a 1993 survey (2013: 871).

The primary difference between Anabar and Taimyr Dolgan varieties in our corpus is the amount of Russian used by the latter groups. This is not surprising: there is more contact with Russian in Krasnoyarsk Region as a whole, and higher contact with Sakha, both standard and northern varieties, in the Anabar region. Our phonological analysis shows that Anabar Dolgan does not have any features not also found in northern Sakha dialects. Future research needs to focus on morphology and syntax to see what, if any, differences are to be found there.

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