

## **A Grammatical Sketch of Even**

In this paper I would like to give a concise description of Even grammar, which is the native language of a minor ethnic group in Russia known as Evens or Lamuts. Even is spoken in Yakutia and the Kamchatka Peninsula, which are in the northeastern part of Russia and Siberia. It is the mother tongue of 43.8% of the Evens, whose total population was 17,055 in 1989 (Malchukov, p.3). Therefore Even had a total of 7470 mother-tongue speakers in 1989. The majority of Evens are bilingual. They speak Russian and Even. They use Even especially in family life.

Even is a written language. In the early 1930s Even's writing system was based on the Latin alphabet, but in 1937 it was changed to the Cyrillic alphabet. In 1958, some special letters were added to the Even alphabet (Malchukov p.4).

Even belongs to the Tungusic language family which is under the Altaic phylum of Ural-Altaic languages. Tungusic is divided into two subfamilies in itself: North and South Tungusic. Even is a North Tungusic language, whose closest relatives are Evenki and Negidal (Please see Figure 1 for a family tree). Being a Ural-Altaic language, Even displays many of the characteristics other languages of this phylum have such as agglutination, SOV word order, vowel harmony, a complex case system, and postpositions. We'll explore these in the later parts of the paper, but first start with the phonology of Even.

### *1. Even Phonology*

#### *a. Vowel System*

Even has 18 vowels. These vowels are shown in Table 1. The language distinguishes between "hard" and "soft" vowels. Each hard vowel has a corresponding

soft vowel. Hard vowels are lower, have a more back and strained articulation and are pharyngalized (Malchukov, p.5). Hard and soft vowels are shown in Table 2. Also, short and long vowels are phonemic (distinct) in Even.

	front		Central		Back	
	short	long	short	long	short	long
high	i i	ii ii			u u	uu uu
mid	e	<sup>1</sup> e ee			o oo	oo oo
low	a	<sup>1</sup> a aa				

Table 1: Vowel system of Even

hard	i	ii	a	aa	u	uu	o	oo	<sup>1</sup> a
soft	i	ii	e	ee	u	uu	o	oo	<sup>1</sup> e

Table 2: Hard and Soft vowels in Even vowel system (Vowels /<sup>1</sup>e/ and /<sup>1</sup>a/ are similar to rising diphthongs)

### b. Consonantal System

There are 17 consonants in Even. These are shown in Table 3.

	bilabial	alveolar	palato-alveolar	Velar	uvular	pharyngeal
stops	p b	t d	c d	k g	(q)	
fricatives	w	s	j	( )		(h)
nasals	m	n	n	n		
laterals		l	(l)			
rhotics		r				

Table 3: Consonantal system of Even

The stops /c/ and /d / are similar to affricates. The consonants in parenthesis represent the allophonic variants of phonemes (i.e. they are the same phoneme as another one in the table but are pronounced differently at different places).

## 2. Even Morphology

### a. Agglutination

Even, like most Ural -Altaic languages, is agglutinating. It makes use of suffixes to change the meaning of the word by adding the meaning of the suffix to the word to

which the suffix is added. The agglutinating nature of Even can be seen more clearly and easily after the examination of the case system and nouns of Even grammar and with examples.

*b. Case System*

As mentioned earlier, Even does have case, specifically 14 distinct cases. The case markers for different noun classes (Even has 3 noun classes) can be seen in Table 4.

	<b>Class 1</b>	<b>Class 2</b>	<b>Class 3</b>
	ḍuu “house”	hirkan “knife”	ḍuu – ḷ “houses”
Nominative	ḍuu - ∅	hirkan - ∅	ḍuu – ḷ - ∅
Accusative	ḍuu – w	hirka – m	ḍuu – ḷ – bu
Designative	-	-	-
Dative	ḍuu – du	hirkan – du	ḍuu – ḷ – du
Instrumental	ḍuu – c	hirka - n	ḍuu – ḷ - ḍi
Comitative	ḍuu - n un	hirka - n un	ḍuu – ḷ - n un
Locative	ḍuu – la	hirkan – dula	ḍuu – ḷ – dula
Prolative	ḍuu – li	hirkan – duli	ḍuu – ḷ – duli
Directional	ḍuu – tki	hirkan – taki	ḍuu – ḷ – taki
Ablative	ḍuu – duk	hirkan – duk	ḍuu – ḷ – duk
Elative	ḍuu – gic	hirka – nic	ḍuu – ḷ – gic
Directive-Locative	ḍuu – kla	hirka – kla	ḍuu – la – kla
Directive-Prolative	ḍuu – kli	hirka – kli	ḍuu – la – kli
Equative	ḍuu – gcin	hirka – ncin	ḍuu – ḷ – gcin

Table 4: Case system in Even

As can be seen from the table Even has a somewhat complicated case system. Actually, it is even more complicated than shown in this table, because for the sake of simplicity, I omitted the case markings for the nouns with possessive endings. In Even, nouns are marked for possession (see next section on nouns) and such nouns take different case markers. The Designative case marker, which has a similar meaning to the benefactive verb extension in Swahili, is exclusive to this kind of nouns.

The following sentence is an example of how locative marker can be used in Even:

- (1) Bej - Ø            awlan – dula        ilat – ta - n  
man – NOM    glade – LOC        stand – NONFUTURE – 3SG  
“The man stands on the glade”

In this example the locative marker acts as the “on” preposition in English and specifies static location. Another example of the use of the locative marker can be seen in Example (10).

The nominative marker marks the subject as in example (1). Instrumental marker is used to denote an instrument or means:

- (2) turki – c            em-  
slade – INST    come  
“come by slade”

The prolativ case indicates motion within a place or a period of time needed for an event. In (3) it indicates the woman’s motion within the woods:

- (3) Asi - Ø            higi – li            nuulge – n  
woman – NOM    wood – PROL    wander – NONFUT:3SG  
“The woman wanders in the wood”

Ablative marker indicates source (particularly source of motion – it adds the meaning of “from” to the sentence) as in the following example:

- (4) Bujun - Ø            toor – duk        il – ra – n  
reindeer – NOM    ground – ABL    stand up – NONFUTURE – 3SG  
“The reindeer stood up from the ground”

Relative case is similar to the ablative, but it indicates movement away from some place or object. As a last example, the equative case acts as “as” in English (it equates two objects in the discourse):

- (5) Ucaka - Ø - n            bej – gecin    toore – l – re – n  
reindeer – NOM-3SG    man-EQU    speak-INCH-NONFUTURE-3SG  
“His reindeer began to speak as a man”

*c. Nouns*

*c1. Noun classes*

Having examined the complicated case system of Even briefly, let's now turn to nouns. In Even, nouns are classified into three classes (genders) as we have seen above in the case markers. There is not a natural gender distinction among the nouns. The characteristics of the three noun-classes are grammatically different:

- 1) Noun class 1 is comprised of all nouns that do not belong to class 2 or class 3. This class is the default noun class. An example of this class would be *d'uun* ("house").
- 2) Nouns that end with a "primary" *-n* are classified in Noun Class 2. (The difference between a primary and secondary *-n* is that the latter is assumed to have lost a vowel that was at the end of the noun stem (Malchukov, p.7).) For example *hirkan* ("knife") belongs to this class because it ends with a stem-final primary /n/. Other examples of nouns in this class are *etiken* ("old man"), *awlan* ("glade"), *asatkan* ("girl"), *oran* ("reindeer"), *hulican* ("fox").
- 3) Noun class 3 consists of the nouns in the plural form. An example of this class would be *d'uul* ("houses").

*c2. Number (Plural markers)*

In Even nouns are marked for number, possession, and case. We have seen the case markers before, now let's look at the number marking. Singular nouns are not marked, but plural nouns take different plural markers for different noun classes. The plural forms of the nouns in noun class 1 take *-l* (example 6) and noun class 2 nouns take *-r* (example 7).



*c4. Back to Agglutination*

As mentioned before, Even is an agglutinating language. This characteristic can be seen clearly in the following phrase:

- (10) d'uu – l – dula – tan  
house-PL-LOC-3PL  
“in their houses”

Clearly, each suffix adds its own meaning to the word and by that way the meaning of the word changes. The above example also shows us the ordering of suffixes on the noun: {noun stem}{plural suffix}{case marker}{possession marker}

In the examples we have seen so far, it is always the case that the added suffix adds its meaning to the word it is added to. This agglutinative feature of Even is again evident in the verb of example (21), *maawran*, which has taken 3 suffixes which have added their meanings. *-w* is the passive morpheme (see voice and valency altering suffixes part), *-ra* is the nonfuture suffix, and *-n* is the third person singular subject marker.

*d. Adjective agreement*

In Even adjectives agree in number and case with the noun. In some special cases they can agree in possession as well.

- (11) Enj – l – bu      beji – l – bu      emu – re - m  
strong-PL-ACC      man-PL-ACC      bring-NONFUTURE-1SG  
“I brought back the strong men”

In sentence 11, the adjective *enj* agrees with the noun it qualifies, *beji* in number and case (both are marked with plural and accusative suffixes). However, the agreement rules are complex and agreement is only sometimes compulsory. For example, the following sentences have the exact same meaning as (11):

- (12) (a) Enj beji – l – bu emu – re – m  
 strong man-PL-ACC bring-NONFUTURE-1SG  
 “I brought back the strong men”
- (b) Enj – l beji – l – bu emu – re – m  
 strong-PL man-PL-ACC bring – NONFUTURE-1SG  
 “I brought back the strong men”

Adjective agreement is therefore complicated and compulsory only in certain cases that are out of the scope of this paper. However, it is interesting to see that this “optional agreement” may function as an indicator of the importance of the adjective in the sentence (see Malchukov, p. 32).

*e. Subject Agreement*

In Even, the subject is marked on the verb (both person and number). The subject markers are distinct for different tense/mood categories, which we will not deal with in this paper (Tense and mood was not explained well in my sources). Some examples of subject markers are as follows:

- (13) Ora – r - Ø - san berge – l bi – si – ten  
 reindeer-PL-NOM-2PL fat-PL be-PAST-3PL  
 “Your reindeer were fat”

In (13), we see that the verb is added the *-ten* suffix to agree with the 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural subject. The subject marker of the 3<sup>rd</sup> plural person is different for the nonfuture:

- (14) nina – l - Ø meen meen - Ø - ur itme – r  
 dog-PL-NOM bite – NONFUTURE:3PL  
 “The dogs bit each other”

Subject markers for 1<sup>st</sup> singular and 3<sup>rd</sup> singular persons for the nonfuture can also be seen in sentences (3), (4), (5), (11), (12). The subject agreement markers for the nonfuture are shown in Table 5:

1 <sup>st</sup> singular	-m
2 <sup>nd</sup> singular	-nri
3 <sup>rd</sup> singular	-n / -ni
1 <sup>st</sup> plural (exclusive)	-ru / -u
1 <sup>st</sup> plural (inclusive)	-p
2 <sup>nd</sup> plural	-s
3 <sup>rd</sup> plural	-r

Table 5: Subject markers on the verb for the nonfuture.

*f. Voice and valency-altering affixes*

In Even the active voice is unmarked. There are five voice forms which affect the verbal valency: medio-passive, reciprocal, causative, adversative (-passive), and sociative (Malchukov, p.14). The *reciprocal* form denotes mutual actions as can be seen in the following sentences:

(15) Ak – nil - Ø            aw – mat – ta  
 brother-PL-NOM    wash-REC-NONFUT:3PL  
 “The brothers washed each other”

(16) Ak – nil - Ø            meer    niri – l - Ø - bur            aw – mat – ta  
 brother-PL-NOM    self’s    back-PL-NOMREF POS PL    wash-REC-NF3PL  
 “The brothers washed each other’s backs”

In these sentences, the reciprocal morpheme changes the object of the action by making it the subjects (mutually) themselves (in (15)) or by changing the objects (back) possessed by the subjects (brothers – in (16)).

The *Causative* adds a cause to a transitive or intransitive verb by increasing the numerical valency of the verb by one:

(17) Kad’da’k - Ø            miine – w            kool – ra – n  
 Kad’da’k - NOM    wine-ACC            drink-NONFUT-3SG

“Kaddak drank the wine”

- (18) Ewe – sel - Ø    Kad'da'k – u    miine – w    kool – ukan  
Even-PL-NOM Kad'da'k-ACC wine-ACC drink-CAUS:NONFUT:3PL  
“Evens made Kaddak drink the wine”

In (18) the causative morpheme has added another subject (the causee) to the sentence and the original subject of sentence (17) became the direct object of (18). Hence, the causative both increased the numerical valency and changed the valency pattern of the verb.

The adversative(-passive) form usually denotes an action that is unfavorable for the subject (Malchukov, p. 14):

- (19) (a) Arisag - Ø    mut - tule    em - re - n  
ghost-NOM we-LOC come-NONFUT-3SG  
"The ghost came to us"
- (b) Mut - Ø    arisag - du    eme - w - re - p  
we-NOM ghost-DAT come-AD-NONFUT-1PL  
"A ghost came to us, we were negatively affected"

In 19(b), the adversative affix *-w* changes the subject of the sentence to *mut* "we", which was the object of sentence 19(a) and turns *arisag* “ghost” into an object adding a meaning which implies that the subject is negatively affected. This is very similar to what a passive morpheme does, therefore, the affix is called the adversative(-passive) marker.

The adversative form can also be used to form passive sentences:

- (20) Nugde - Ø    etike – m    maa – n  
bear-NOM old man-ACC kill-NONFUT:3SC  
“The bear killed the old man”
- (21) Etiken - Ø    nugde-du    maa - w – ra – n  
old man-NOM bear-DAT kill-AD-NONFUT-3SG  
“The old man was killed by the bear”

As can be seen in (20) and (21) the suffixation of the adversative –w to the verb changes the voice of the verb into passive.

The sociative adds the meaning of “doing together” to the verb. This form, along with the medio-passive was not explained in detail in my sources.

*g. Other interesting characteristics of Even Grammar*

*g1. Vowel Harmony*

As mentioned above Even displays vowel harmony. The hardness or softness of the vowel of the suffix is determined by the hardness or softness of the stem. Each suffix in Even has two forms; one to be used with hard vowel stems and one to be used with soft vowel stems. Please refer to Table 2 for the classification of hard and soft vowels. An example of this phenomenon follows:

- |                   |                |
|-------------------|----------------|
| (22) (a) moo – la | (b) moo – le   |
| wood-LOCATIVE     | water-LOCATIVE |
| “in wood”         | “in water”     |

In (22), -la which contains a hard vowel is added to moo which has a hard vowel in the stem and -le which contains a soft vowel is added to moo, which has a soft vowel in the stem.

*g2. Postpositions*

Even, similarly to Hungarian, makes use of postpositions in its grammar. Two examples of these are given in (23):

- |                                  |                    |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|
| (23) (a) mugdeken herde – du – n | (b) d’uu – w ereli |
| stump bottom-DAT-3SG             | house-ACC around   |
| “under the stump”                | “round the house”  |

*Conclusion*

This paper tried to give a concise introduction to the characteristic properties of Even grammar. Many of the concepts represented here, such as valency -altering affixes or adjective agreement, need more careful examination. The tense/mood system of Even, which is too complicated to describe in this paper is also an interesting topic to examine under Even grammar.

**References:**

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