Journal of Modern Languages
Vol. 35(1) 2025
https://doi.org/10.22452/jml.vol35no1.6

The Vitality of the Daur Language in Inner Mongolia, China

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Received: 18 April 2024 Accepted: 22 January 2025

Abstract

This article reports on research assessing the vitality of Daur, an ethnic language spoken mainly by Daur people residing in Inner Mongolia, China. The research involved a language use survey, individual interviews, and the EGIDS framework. Based on analysis of Daur use patterns in various domains and answers to the five key EGIDS questions, it is observed that Daur enjoys relatively low vitality (6b) and seems to be threatened in Inner Mongolia. The likely main causes for its relatively low vitality are the lack of a unified and widespread writing system and the small size of the speaker population. After presenting the findings and discussing the vitality level of Daur, this article concludes with some general implications and considerations for the maintenance of the Daur language in Inner Mongolia. This research sheds light on issues related to the vitality of ethnic languages in Inner Mongolia and seeks to contribute to the discussion on ethnic language maintenance in ethnic regions and areas in China.

Keywords: Language Vitality, Language Use, Chinese Ethnic Language, the Daur language, Inner Mongolia, EGIDS

1. Introduction

The Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (hereafter Inner Mongolia) is a multilingual and multi-ethnic region located in northern China covering an area of 1,183,000 square kilometres and inhabited by 24 million people. The largest segment of the population is Han Chinese (76.52%), with the Mongolian segment following at 19.53% (2023 Census). In addition to Han Chinese and Mongols, Inner Mongolia is home to ethnic groups such as Daur, Manchu, Ewenki, Hui (Chinese Muslims), Korean, Oroqen, Russian, and others (Xu & Wang, 2020). Even though minority ethnic groups such as these constitute only a small percentage of the total population, they are of great importance due to the unique role they play in national unity, border security, and political stability (Xia, 2009). Chinese is the sole official language of Inner Mongolia. Mongolian, recognized as an ethnic language and widely spoken and written in the region (Puthuval, 2017), holds a notable degree of prestige. It is actively used in significant areas such as education and media, paralleling Chinese, and is also extensively used in in daily life among its speakers. English, being an international language, is visible in education, trade, and tourism. Most ethnic minorities in Inner Mongolia have their own language, though the Hui and Manchu people speak Chinese and its dialects. However, due to modernization and globalization, ethnic languages in Inner Mongolia have been increasingly marginalised by majority and global languages due to the emphasis of Putonghua (Mandarin Chinese) and English education, putting some of them in danger of diminution or even extinction.

The Daur people, an ethnic minority group in northeast China, had a population of 86,558 in Inner Mongolia in 2022 (Census 2023). They currently inhabit vast areas yet live in small close-knit communities; they are renowned for their outstanding farming abilities (Qu, 2021). They predominantly live in Morin Dawa Daur Autonomous Banner in Hulunbuir, Inner Mongolia, with some groups in the Tacheng Prefecture in Xinjiang, and the Meilisi Daur District in Qiqihar, Heilongjiang (Jia et al., 2022; Qu, 2021). Figure 1 presents the main residence of the Daur group in Inner Mongolia, specifically the Morin Dawa Daur Autonomous Banner. The Daur communities in Hulunbuir are divided geographically: some are located in the plains near the Nen and Nomin Rivers, while others are located in the Yimin and Hailar River Basins in Hailar and Ewenki Banner (Sa, 2019). Their language, Daur, is an Altai-Mongolic language and lacks an officially recognized and widespread writing system to date (Gaowa et al., 2022; Sa,

2019). There are four main dialects of the Daur language: (1) the Amur dialect; (2) the Nonni dialect (consisting of four varieties); (3) the Hailar dialect; and (4) the Xinjiang dialect (Ding, 2008). In 2000, there were approximately 130,000 Daur speakers; due to the roughly similar characteristics of Daur and Mongolian and the popularization of Putonghua, the Daur people generally use Chinese in daily oral communication and Mongolian for certain written communication purposes (Ding, 2008; Wang, 2020).

Figure 1. The Primary Residence of the Daur People in Inner Mongolia

(Image from https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morin_Dawa_Daur_Autonomous_Banner)

The study of ethnic language vitality in China began in the early 2000s. One early influential publication by Daobu (2005) examined language vitality, language attitudes, and language planning in China, with particular attention to ethnic languages. Daobu (2005) classified Chinese ethnic languages into three distinct groups in terms of language vitality, placing Daur in the third group and indicating that it appears to be endangered to some extent. Possible factors influencing ethnic language vitality in China include the number of speakers, the level of institutional support, the population distribution, the size of speaker population and the local community, language use and attitudes, and whether the language has a written system and/or is taught at schools (Daobu, 2005). Sun (2006), in later work, ranked Chinese ethnic languages in terms of vitality levels and discussed some challenges and strategies for ethnic

language maintenance in China. Sun (2006) categorized Chinese ethnic languages into six groups (levels 1 to 6) based on the number of speakers, the proportion of speakers within the total population, intergenerational transmission, language use and attitudes, official support, and availability of language materials. In view of these two systematic studies on the vitality levels of Chinese ethnic languages, there seems to be some evidence to indicate that Daur is endangered and threatened in China overall (Daobu, 2005; Sun, 2006), even though its vitality in specific regions or areas such as Inner Mongolia has been hardly explored.

Given all this, the current study seeks to assess the vitality of the Daur in Inner Mongolia. This assessment is conducted using a combination of surveys, interviews, and the EGIDS framework as outlined by Lewis and Simon (2010). The study is guided by two central research questions: (1) What is the vitality level of the Daur among the multilingual Daur people of Inner Mongolia? And (2) What factors influence the vitality of the Daur among multilingual Daur people in Inner Mongolia? The subsequent sections provide an overview of the key frameworks relevant to language vitality assessment.

2. Literature review

Language vitality, or ethnolinguistic vitality, refers to a group's ability 'to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in intergroup situations' and claims that 'ethnolinguistic minorities with little or no group vitality would eventually cease to exist as distinctive groups' (Giles et al., 1977, p. 308). According to UNESCO (2003), it refers the ability of a language to maintain and sustain its functions in the face of external pressures such as globalization and dominant language influences. Language vitality provides a framework for systematically describing the socio-structural relationships between language groups in contact as well as an explanation of how language behaviour is affected by this socio-structural environment (Harwood et al., 1994; Johnson et al., 1983). It is neither simple nor easy to accurately evaluate the vitality level of a language since there are many variables and factors that need to be taken into consideration (Coluzzi, 2017). Many assessment tools and scales have been developed by researchers in the past three decades: the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) established by Fishman in 1991, UNESCO's Major Evaluative Factors of Language Vitality proposed by a panel of scholars in 2003, and the Extended Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS) developed by Lewis and Simons in 2010 are among the best-known of these tools.

2.1 The GIDS framework

The GIDS framework highlights the crucial role of intergenerational transmission in sustaining a language and provides a way to identify where a language is on the disruption scale, which spans a range of cases from widespread use to no use at all (see Table 1). The key factor in assessing a language's vitality is its transmission across generations (Fishman, 1991). There is no doubt that parents play a crucial role in intergenerational transmission, but it is also true that societal and institutional choices have considerable influence on the language choices made by parents for their children.

Table 1. GIDS (Fishman, 1991)

Level	Description
1	The language is used in education, work, mass media, and government at the nationwide level
2	The language is used for local and regional mass media and governmental services
3	The language is used for local and regional work by both insiders and outsiders
4	Literacy in the language is transmitted through education
5	The language is used orally by all generations and is effectively used in written form throughout the community
6	The language is used orally by all generations and is being learned by children as their first language
7	The child-bearing generation knows the language well enough to use it with their elders but is not transmitting it to their children
8	The only remaining speakers of the languages are members of the grandparent generation

Although this framework has significantly advanced our understanding of language shift and its possible reversal and has been the most frequently referenced scale for assessing language endangerment over the past three decades, several limitations have surfaced in recent years. For example, its portrayal of disruption levels is relatively static and lacks a comprehensive depiction of all possible status indicators for a language. Furthermore, while intergenerational transmission is identified as the most crucial factor in the scale, it is least detailed at the lower end of the scale, where disruption levels are most severe (Lewis & Simon, 2010), limiting its overall explanatory effectiveness.

2.2 The UNESCO Framework

The UNESCO scale, on the other hand, classifies vitality in terms of a six-level framework that ranges from the highest level (Grade 5) to the lowest level (Grade 0), providing nine factors for determining the level including (UNESCO, 2003). Table 2 presents the six levels of endangerment in relation to intergenerational transmission. It is noteworthy that the vitality level of a language cannot be determined by one factor alone; even if the language scores highly on one factor, urgent attention may be needed to other criteria. Additionally, the guidelines caution against combining the results of these nine separate evaluations into a single score by averaging them or otherwise synthesizing them. When compared to the GIDS scale, the UNESCO scale offers a more diversified set of categories at the weaker end of the scale (Lewis & Simon, 2010).

Table 2. Six Degrees of the UNESCO Framework

Grade	Degree of endangerment	Intergenerational language transmission
5	Safe	The language is spoken by all generations.
4	Unsafe	Most but not all children or families speak the language as their first language, but it may be restricted to specific social domains.
3	Definitely endangered	The language is no longer being learned as the mother tongue by children in the home.
2	Severely endangered	The language is spoken only by grandparents and older generations; while the parent generation may understand it, they do not speak it to their children.
1	Critically endangered	The youngest speakers are in the great-grandparental generation, but they speak the language partially and infrequently
0	Extinct	There is no one who can speak or remember the language.

2.3 The EGIDS framework

In 2010, Lewis and Simons developed the GIDS framework by introducing three new categories, expanding its applicability to all languages. They added two new levels at the lower end of the scale: level 9 (dormant) and level 10 (extinct), and one new level at the upper end: level 0 (international languages). Additionally, the EGIDS framework builds on UNESCO's detailed classifications of language endangerment by further subdividing two GIDS levels—6a versus 6b and 8a versus 8b—resulting in a thirteen-level scale. Like the GIDS but unlike the UNESCO

framework, the EGIDS at its core measures the level of disruption of intergenerational transmission. Thus, in this scale, the lower numbers correspond to the stronger and more vital languages, while the higher numbers correspond to the weaker and more endangered languages. Each level in EGIDS is now assigned a specific name corresponding to its stage of development, as shown in Table 3, which aligns with the corresponding language vitality index categories (Lewis & Simon, 2011, 2016).

Table 3. EGIDS (Lewis & Simon, 2010)

Level	Label	Description
0	International	The language is used internationally for a broad range of functions.
1	National	The language is used in education, work, mass media, government at the nationwide level.
2	Regional	The language is used for local and regional mass media and governmental services.
3	Trade	The language is used for local and regional work by both insiders and outsiders.
4	Educational	Literacy in the language is being transmitted through a system of public education.
5	Written	The language is used orally by all generations and is effectively used in written form in parts of the community.
6a	Vigorous	The language is used orally by all generations and is being learned by children as their first language.
6b	Threatened	The language is used orally by all generations but only some of the child-bearing generation are transmitting it to their children.
7	Shifting	The child-bearing generation knows the language well enough to use it among themselves but none are transmitting it to their children.
8a	Moribund	The only remaining active speakers of the language are members of the grandparent generation.
8b	Nearly extinct	The only remaining speakers of the language are members of the grandparent generation or older who have little opportunity to use the language.
9	Dormant	The language serves as a reminder of heritage identity for an ethnic community. No one has more than symbolic proficiency.
10	Extinct	No one retains a sense of ethnic identity associated with the language, even for symbolic purposes.

Compared to the GIDS, the EGIDS includes several additional factors at both ends of the scale and incorporates assessment tools that were absent in the original framework (Coluzzi, 2017). Each level of the EGIDS framework is assigned a label that provides a summary of the

level of language vitality, thus providing useful verbal descriptors for people who would rather use words than numbers. In the EGIDS framework, the vitality level can be determined by answering five key questions. Figure 2 presents the key questions and allowable answers.

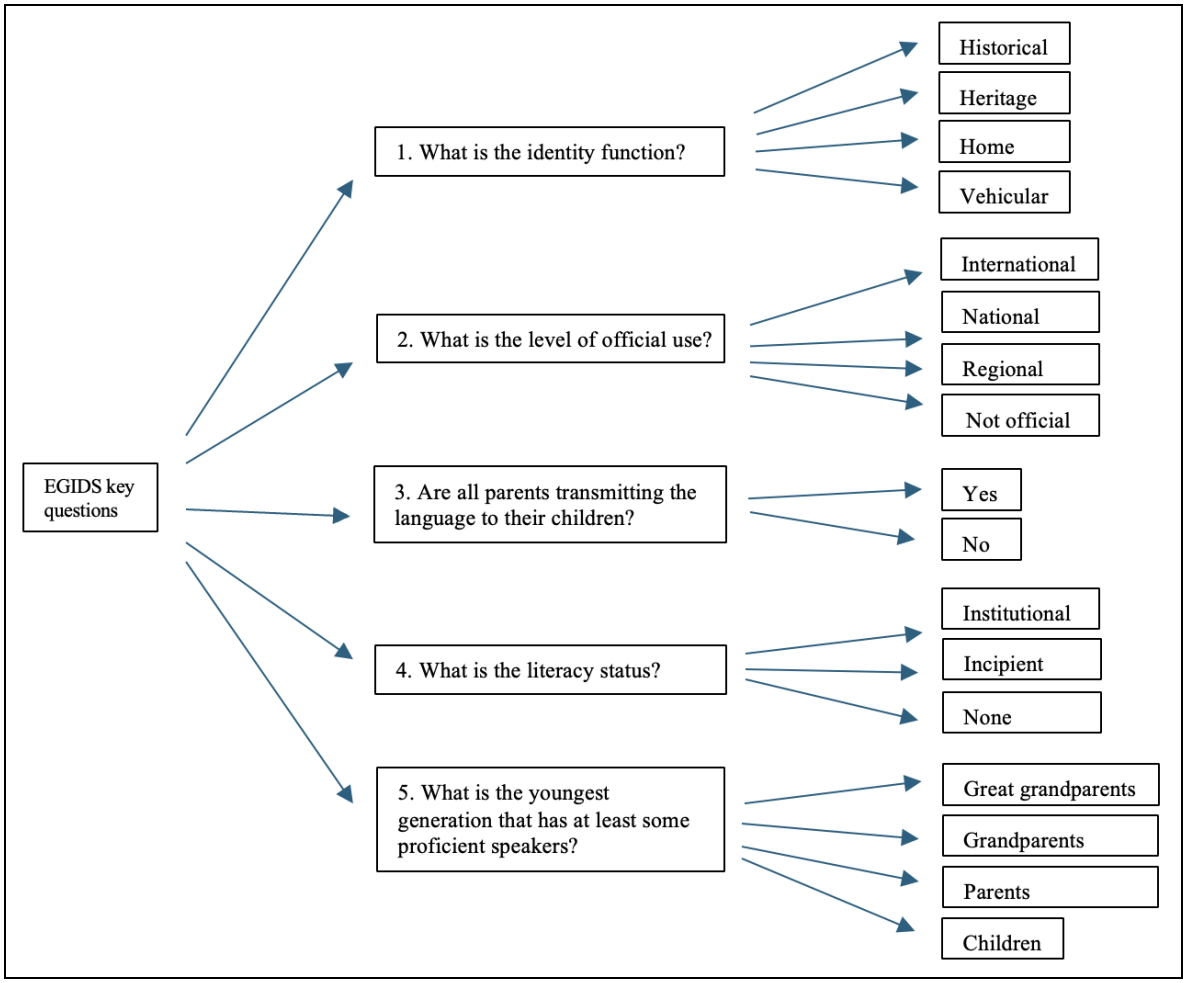

Figure 2. The EGIDS Key Questions with Allowable Answers

While the EGIDS offers a more structured approach compared to the UNESCO framework, it is considered more general and less precise as it overlooks factors such as speaker population, language attitudes, language policies, and the level of language documentation (Dwyer, 2011).

However, EGIDS scores and labels are briefer and easier to compare and analyse, providing an overall picture of vitality level at first glance. Furthermore, since the EGIDS level

is determined by answers to questions with a limited range of permitted answers, it is somewhat more objective than the UNESCO scale (Coluzzi, 2017).

3. Methods

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining a language use survey with individual interviews. The fieldwork for this study was conducted from May to September 2021, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, which despite creating difficulties did not prevent the author from collecting data. A total of 148 Daur respondents from Inner Mongolia completed the online survey. The survey aimed to capture linguistic data on the participants' language use and choices across various social domains such as within the family, at the workplace or school, and in other social contexts. Adapted from Coluzzi's design (2013; 2017), it consists of 25 questions covering three aspects: general information, language ability, and language use patterns and preferences in different social domains and for various purposes. The survey was administered in Chinese, and the research objectives were explained in detail to participants. Respondents were recruited through three main channels: (1) personal contacts; (2) snowball sampling, where initial respondents referred others; and (3) relevant online platforms, forums, and social media groups. As shown in Table 4, most survey respondents were between 15 and 55 years old (82.5%), with only 4% of the respondents being below 15 and 13.5% being above 55 years of age. As for gender, there was a somewhat uneven distribution, with females outnumbering males in the sample by 58.1% to 41.9%. Unexpectedly, respondents with bachelor's degrees were predominant, comprising 73.6% of the sample, while 19.6% of respondents attended high school or primary school, and 6.8% had a postgraduate degree.

Table 4. Background of the Survey Respondents

Age	Under 15	6 (4%)
	15-35	62 (41.9%)
	36-55	60 (40.6%)
	Over 55	20 (13.5%)
Gender	Male	62 (41.9%)
	Female	86 (58.1%)
Education	High school or below	29 (19.6%)
	Undergraduate	109 (73.6%)
	Postgraduate	10 (6.8%)

Additionally, six Daur respondents were interviewed in the Morin Dawa Daur Autonomous Banner, a locality constituting the primary residence for the Daur people in Inner Mongolia, to validate the survey results and provide more in-depth information on language use. Table 5 presents the background of interviewees. The selection of these interviewees was guided by specific criteria to ensure their relevance and representativeness. All interviewees are officially registered as Daur ethnicity on their identification documents, affirming their cultural identity, with preference given to individuals proficient in the Daur language. However, monolingual Chinese speakers and bilingual speakers of Daur and Chinese were also considered to reflect the linguistic diversity within the community. Additionally, efforts were made to include individuals from diverse age groups to capture the generational differences in language use. The limited number of Daur interview participants was a result of travel restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, which severely disrupted travel in the research areas. These individual interviews involved a series of short questions (see Appendix) aimed at providing further insights into language use across different social domains.

Table 5. Background of Interviewees

No.	Age	First language	Most fluent language	Education	Occupation
1	28	Chinese	Chinese	Undergraduate	Civil servant
2	34	Daur	Daur and Chinese	Undergraduate	Salesperson
3	37	Daur	Daur and Chinese	High school	Shop owner
4	41	Chinese	Chinese	Undergraduate	Salesperson
5	50	Daur and Chinese	Daur and Chinese	High school	Social worker
6	61	Daur	Daur	Primary school	Folk artist

Despite an attempt to recruit participants from a range of different age groups, the results indicate an uneven distribution across age categories. Consequently, to aid the analysis, the age groups were after careful consideration merged into two: a younger group (under 36) and an older group (over 36). Subsequently, the responses provided by these two groups were compared to examine intergenerational language transmission and language shift and to answer the five key EGIDS questions. In addition, the interview results served as supplementary findings for this study.

4. Results

The survey and interview data were analysed and compared to delineate the Daur language use patterns and intergenerational language shift in the context of Inner Mongolia. It is clear from Table 6 that, for as many as 43.9% of the respondents, Daur is their first language, which is identical to the percentage of respondents who consider Chinese as their first language; only 12.2% consider both Chinese and Daur languages equally as their first language (Q4). Out of the 148 Daur respondents, 63.5% selected Chinese (on its own and together with other languages) as one of the languages they speak most fluently, while 14.9% chose Daur (on its own and together with other languages) as one of the languages they speak most fluently (Q5). Chinese is exceptionally important for the Daur respondents, both within and outside the family, presumably due to its widespread use in daily life in the research area. When we consider the different age groups, the percentage of younger respondents who list Daur as their first language is 24.1% lower than older respondents (Q4, respectively 30.9% and 55%). The percentage of younger respondents who consider Daur to be their most fluent language is 11.2% lower than the older respondents (Q5, 8.8% and 20%). As for Chinese, 79.4% of the younger respondents believe Chinese to be their most fluent language, while 50% of the older respondents consider Chinese to be the language in which they are most fluent, which appears to show a clear shift from Daur to Chinese.

Table 6. First Language and Most Fluent Language(s)

Age group		**Under 36 (68)**	**36 and over (80)**
4. First language			
Daur	43.9%	21 (30.9%)	44 (55%)
Chinese	43.9%	36 (52.9%)	29 (36.3%)
Daur and Chinese	12.2%	11 (16.2%)	7 (8.7%)
Other (please specify)	0%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
5. Most fluent language(s)			
Daur	14.9%	6 (8.8%)	16 (20%)
Chinese	63.5%	54 (79.4%)	40 (50%)
Daur and Chinese	21.6%	8 (11.8%)	24 (30%)
Other (please specify)	0%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

The interviewees responded to questions concerning their first and most fluent languages. Their views echoed those found in the survey data. Relevant extracts from the interviews, which have been lightly edited for clarity and concision where appropriate, are presented

> Extract 1:
> My first language and the most fluent language is Daur. It is not just the language I grew up with—it's also deeply tied to my cultural identity and everyday experiences (#1, 28 years old)

> Extract 2:
> I was born and raised in a traditional Daur family. Despite this strong cultural environment, Chinese is my first language and the one I speak most fluently. Within my family, both my parents and my grandfather strongly identify as Daur, while my grandmother is Mongolian. My grandparents communicate with each other primarily in Daur or Mongolian, as neither of them speaks Chinese. While my parents are fluent in both Chinese and Daur, they predominantly use Chinese when speaking with me. Despite their attempts, I only managed to learn a few simple words and phrases in Daur, which I deeply regret (#4, 41 years old).

> Extract 3:
> Daur is my first language, and my proficiency in Chinese is limited. I find myself using Daur much more frequently than Chinese in my daily life, especially in conversations within the family and community. While I can communicate in Chinese, I don't feel as comfortable or confident speaking it compared to Daur (#6, 61 years old).

Regarding language use within the family and with various family members (see Table 7), for as many as 60.1% of the respondents, Chinese was the most used language within the family, and the percentage of younger respondents using Daur was 13.7% lower than the percentage of

older respondents using Daur (Q6, respectively 22.5% and 8.8%). There is also a clear decrease in the use of Daur as the age of the family members decreases (Q7-Q12). Daur is generally used in 44.6% of cases with grandparents (Q7), 27% of cases with parents (Q8), and 18.9% of cases with siblings/cousins (Q9). With partners, the use of Daur decreases to 10.1% (Q10), while it decreases further to 4.1% with children (Q11) and even further to only 2.7% with grandchildren (Q12). With grandchildren (Q12), Chinese is the most frequently used language, reaching 31.1%, although more than 61.5% of respondents have no grandchildren yet.

Table 7. Language Use Within the Family

Age group		**Under 36 (68)**	**36 and over (80)**
6. Language(s) used within the family (the most used ones)			
Daur	16.2%	6 (8.8%)	18 (22.5%)
Chinese	60.1%	50 (73.5%)	39 (48.8%)
Daur and Chinese	23.7%	12 (17.7%)	23 (28.7%)
Other (please specify)	0%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
7. Language(s) used with grandparents			
Daur	44.6%	20 (29.4%)	46 (20%)
Chinese	39.6%	37 (54.4%)	21 (50%)
Daur and Chinese	13.5%	11 (16.2%)	9 (30%)
Other (please specify)	2.7%	0 (0%)	4 (0%)
Other: Mongolian			
8. Language(s) used with parents			
Daur	27%	7 (10.3%)	33 (41.3%)
Chinese	50.7%	48 (70.6%)	27 (33.7%)
Daur and Chinese	22.3%	13 (19.1%)	20 (25%)
Other (please specify)	0%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
9. Language(s) used with siblings/cousin			
Daur	18.9%	5 (7.4%)	23 (28.8%)
Chinese	63.5%	56 (82.3%)	38 (47.5%)
Daur and Chinese	16.9%	7 (10.3%)	18 (22.5%)
Other (please specify)	0.7%	0 (0%)	1 (1.2%)
Other: Chinese dialects			
10. Language(s) used with partner			
Daur	10.1%	0 (0%)	15 (18.8%)
Chinese	71.6%	51 (75%)	55 (68.7%)

Age group		**Under 36 (68)**	**36 and over (80)**
Daur and Chinese	9.5%	5 (7.3%)	9 (11.3%)
Other (please specify)	0.7%	1 (1.5%)	0 (0%)
NR	8.1%	11 (16.2%)	1 (1.2%)
Other: English			
11. Language(s) used with children			
Daur	4.1%	1 (1.5%)	5 (6.3%)
Chinese	65.5%	35 (51.5%)	62 (77.5%)
Daur and Chinese	10.1%	5 (7.3%)	10 (12.5%)
Other (please specify)	0%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
NR	20.3%	27 (39.7%)	3 (3.7%)
12. Language(s) used with grandchildren			
Daur	2.7%	0 (0%)	4 (5%)
Chinese	31.1%	8 (11.8%)	38 (47.5%)
Daur and Chinese	3.4%	1 (1.5%)	4 (5%)
Other (please specify)	1.4%	0 (0%)	2 (2.5%)
NR	61.4%	59 (86.7%)	32 (40%)
Other: Chinese dialects			

A noticeable trend concerning the decrease in Daur use can be seen when it comes to comparing the older and younger age groups. It is clear from the survey data that the older respondents in general use more Daur and less Chinese both within the family generally (Q6) and with various family members (Q7-Q12) as compared to the younger respondents. Overall, this indicates a massive language shift from Daur to a mixture of Daur and Chinese within the family and with different family members, and this point is supported by the interviews.

Extract 5:

I speak Daur with my parents, siblings, and wife, and I speak both Daur and Chinese with my son and daughter at home (#3, 37 years old).

Extract 6:

At home, I speak Daur with my siblings, parents, and grandparents. With children, I tend to use both Chinese and Daur because some of the younger generation, particularly Daur kids and teenagers, may not be as

familiar with Daur and might struggle to understand it. With my son, I use both Chinese and Daur. With my partner, who is Han Chinese, I use Chinese (#5, 50 years old).

Extract 7:
I speak Daur with my wife, son, and relatives, but I speak Chinese with my grandson and my daughter-in-law (#6, 61 years old).

Some interviewees also shared their views on Daur language shift:

Extract 8:
The Daur language serves as a bridge connecting the older and younger generations. Elders, like my grandparents, carry a wealth of wisdom and life experiences, making conversations with them meaningful. If we stop using Daur, the richness of our culture and traditions may be lost to future generations. Language is a way to preserve heritage and pass down our collective history. Without it, the connection to our roots may weaken, and important aspects of our identity could fade away (#1, 28 years old).

Extract 9:
Even though my son can speak Daur, he refuses to do so. He always feels embarrassed because he thinks his accent and tone are not standard (#2, 34 years old).

Extract 10:
I am very disappointed with this trend. Sometimes when I speak Daur to my children at home, they respond in Chinese. I think in future more and more Daur children will grow up speaking fluent Chinese, while fewer and fewer will maintain their ability to speak Daur. If this continues, our language could be at risk of fading (#3, 37 years old).

Extract 11:

> The lack of a written system for the Daur language makes it even more challenging to pass it on to future generations. Since it is an oral language, everything relies on spoken communication, which increases the risk of it being forgotten as fewer people use it (#5, 50 years old).

When we move from the family domain to outside domains (see Table 8), similar trends can be found. That is, Chinese is used more both with friends (Q13, 75.7%) and with neighbours (Q14, 85.8%). In more formal situations such as shopping, with the doctors, in public offices, at workplaces or schools, and with the police, the use of Daur almost disappears entirely. In these contexts, there are no notable differences between the two groups concerning Daur use patterns. However, in some cases (Q15-Q19), younger respondents are more likely to use a mixture of Chinese and Daur than older respondents in these situations. Overall, it seems that Daur is regularly used only within the family or with family members, while Chinese, the language of officialdom and bureaucracy in this region, is used frequently outside the family. This massive language shift from Daur to Chinese was likely influenced by a broader societal shift in China as a whole towards Chinese as the dominant language of communication, as well as by a need for respondents to succeed academically and socially in a Mandarin-speaking environment.

Table 8. Language Use Outside the Family

Age group		**Under 36 (68)**	**36 and over (80)**
13. Language(s) used within friends			
Daur	2%	1 (1.5%)	2 (2.5%)
Chinese	75.7%	53 (77.9%)	59 (73.8%)
Daur and Chinese	22.3%	14 (20.6%)	19 (23.7%)
Other (please specify)	0%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
14. Language(s) used with neighbours			
Daur	2%	1 (1.5%)	2 (2.5%)
Chinese	85.8%	61 (89.7%)	66 (82.5%)
Daur and Chinese	12.2%	6 (8.8%)	12 (15%)
Other (please specify)	0%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
15. Language(s) used when shopping			
Daur	0%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Age group		**Under 36 (68)**	**36 and over (80)**
Chinese	96.6%	64 (94.1%)	79 (98.8%)
Daur and Chinese	3.4%	4 (5.9%)	1 (1.2%)
Other (please specify)	0%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
16. Language(s) used with the doctor			
Daur	0%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Chinese	96.6%	63 (92.6%)	80 (100%)
Daur and Chinese	3.4%	5 (7.4%)	0 (0%)
Other (please specify)	0%	0 (0%)	0 （0%）
17. Language(s) used in public offices			
Daur	0%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Chinese	99.3%	67 (98.5%)	80 (100%)
Daur and Chinese	0.7%	1 (1.5%)	0 (0%)
Other (please specify)	0%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
18. Language(s) used at work/school			
Daur	0%	0 (0%)	0 （0%）
Chinese	93.2%	61 (89.7%)	77 （96.3%）
Daur and Chinese	6.8%	7 (10.3%)	3 （3.7%）
Other (please specify)	0%	0 （0%）	0 （0%）
19. Language(s) used with the police			
Daur	0%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Chinese	99.3%	67 (98.5%)	80 (100%)
Daur and Chinese	0.7%	1 (1.5%)	0 (0%)
Other (please specify)	0%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

The responses in the interviews provided further insights into language use both within and outside the family, as illustrated in the following extracts:

> Extract 12:
> I speak Chinese both inside and outside the family, even with Daur people (#1, 28 years old).

Extract 13:

When I talk to others, I use Chinese if they are Han Chinese and might opt for Daur if they are Daur. In the towns, I speak Chinese more since there are larger Han Chinese communities there, while in the villages, I speak Daur more (#5, 50 years old).

Extract 14:

I use Daur on most occasions. But I use Chinese when I must (#6, 61 years old).

Regarding language use for leisure and information purposes, it is evident from Table 9 that Chinese is predominant, and that the use of Daur does not change much (it ranges between 0.7% to 2%) in any of the domains (Q20-Q25). As for intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic communication, Chinese is mainly used in both cases (Q24, 85.1%, Q25, 96%). When it comes to the different age groups, there are no notable differences concerning the use of Chinese and the use of Daur in these contexts. However, it is clear that the younger respondents tend to use more English than the older respondents, which may be due to the effects of English education and globalization.

Table 9. Language Use for Leisure and Information

Age group		**Under 36 (68)**	**36 and over (80)**
20. The radio programmes/music normally listened to			
Daur	0.7%	0 (0%)	1 (1.2%)
Chinese	83.8%	54 (79.4%)	70 (87.5%)
English	0%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Daur and Chinese	7.4%	4 (5.9%)	7 (8.8%)
Chinese and English	6.8%	10 (14.7%)	0 (0%)
Daur and English	0%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Other (please specify)	1.3%	0 (0%)	2 (2.5%)
	Other: Mongolian		
21. The TV programmes/movies normally watched			
Daur	0%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Age group		Under 36 (68)	36 and over (80)
Chinese	79.1%	49 (72%)	68 (85%)
English	0%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Daur and Chinese	4.7%	3 (4.4%)	4 (5%)
Chinese and English	13.5%	15 (22.1%)	5 (6.3%)
Daur and English	0.7%	1 (1.5%)	0 (0%)
Other (please specify)	2%	0 (0%)	3 (3.7%)
Other: Mongolian			
22. The books, magazines and newspapers normally read			
Daur	0%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Chinese	90.5%	56 (82.4%)	78 (97.5%)
English	0%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Daur and Chinese	0.7%	0 (0%)	1 (1.25%)
Chinese and English	8.1%	11 (16.1%)	1 (1.25%)
Daur and English	0.7%	1 (1.5%)	0 (0%)
Other (please specify)	0%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
23. The language(s) normally used to write comments on mainstream social network sites/use search engine			
Daur	0%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Chinese	95.3%	63 (92.6%)	78 (97.5%)
English	0%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Daur and Chinese	0.7%	0 (0%)	1 (1.25%)
Chinese and English	4%	5 (7.4%)	1 (1.25%)
Daur and English	0%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Other (please specify)	0%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
24. The language(s) normally used to write letters/emails/messages to friends from the same ethnic group			
Daur	2%	0 (0%)	3 (3.8%)
Chinese	85.1%	57 (83.8%)	69 (86.2%)
English	0%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Daur and Chinese	11.5%	9 (13.2%)	8 (10%)
Chinese and English	0.7%	1 (1.5%)	0 (0%)
Daur and English	0%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Other (please specify)	0.7%	1 (1.5%)	0 (0%)
Other: Mongolian			
25. The language(s) normally used to write letters/emails/messages to friends from different ethnic groups			
Daur	0%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Chinese	96%	66 (97%)	76 (95%)
English	0%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Age group		Under 36 (68)	36 and over (80)
Daur and Chinese	2%	0 (0%)	3 (3.7%)
Chinese and English	2%	2 (3%)	1 (1.3%)
Daur and English	0%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Other (please specify)	0%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

The interviews illustrate the preference for Chinese and English:

Extract 15:
I prefer Chinese and English songs and drama. And I usually send messages to others in Chinese (#1, 28 years old).

Extract 16:
I listen to Chinese music more. I like Chinese drama and books, too. As for Daur songs, I sometimes watch short videos on TikTok (#3, 34 years old).

Extract 17:
I am a Daur folk artist. I listen to Daur music often (#6, 61 years old).

Overall, based on the results, the language shift from Daur to Chinese is evident in most cases. Further, in all cases, the interview data, while providing more insights into participant opinions and experiences, coincided with the survey results.

5. Discussion

5.1 Evaluating the Vitality of the Daur Language Through the EGIDS

As shown in Figure 3, the vitality level of Daur in Inner Mongolia corresponds to 6b, endangered, which is interpreted as indicating that Daur is still spoken orally across all generations but that only some members of the childbearing generation are passing Daur on to their children. The EGIDS scale includes five questions with allowable answers, and in Figure 3, the answers reflecting the situation of Daur are highlighted. It is worth mentioning that when analysing language data for vitality using the EGIDS framework, it is not strictly necessary to

answer all five questions. However, doing so provides a more comprehensive understanding of a language in question's status, since the questions address different aspects of language vitality, addressing each one can help paint a more thorough picture of the situation of the programmes. As such, in what follows, although not all questions need to be answered in the EGIDS scale, all provided responses are summarized for completeness and reference.

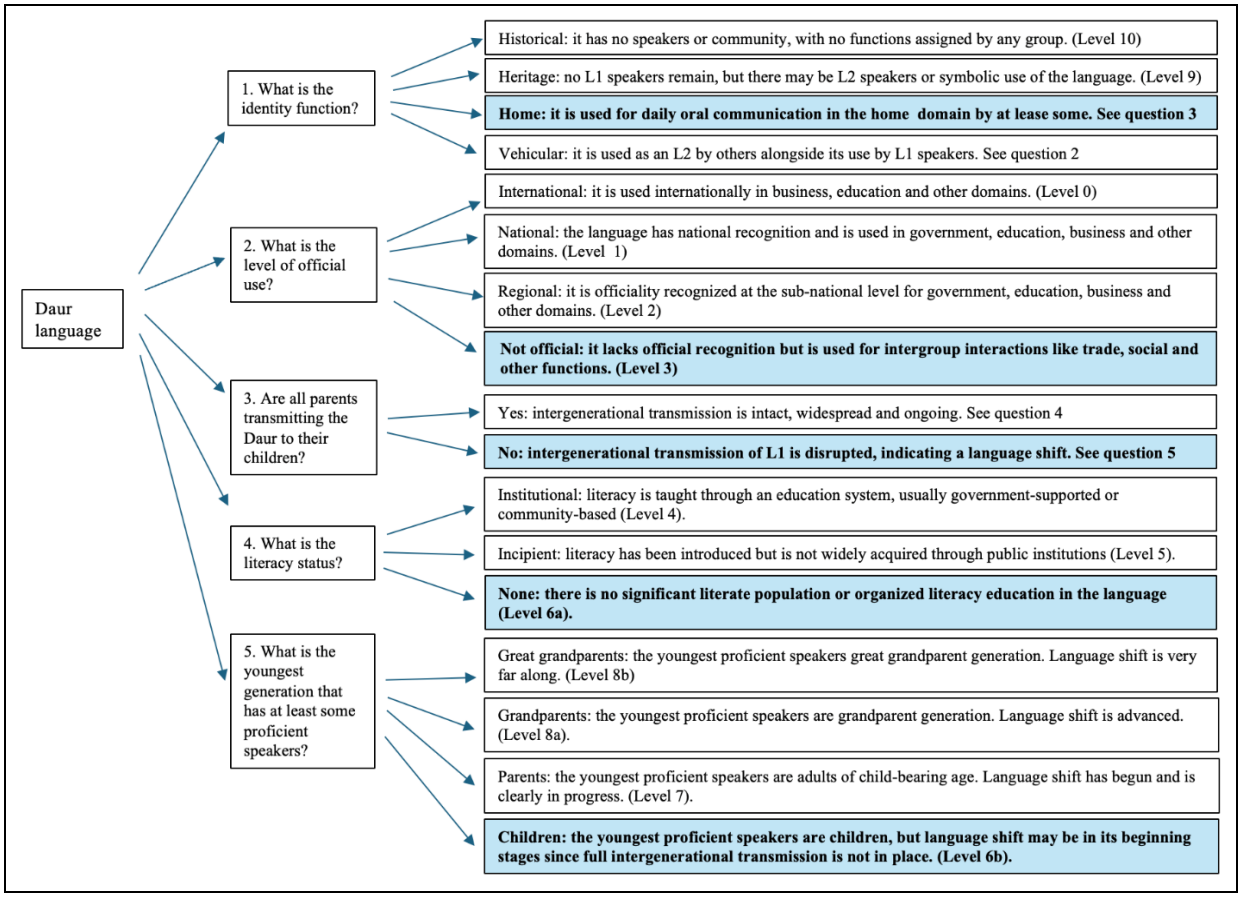

Figure 3. Answers to the Five EGIDS Questions

The answer to the response to the first key EGIDS question is 'Home level', indicating that at least some Daur individuals use Daur for daily oral interaction with family members. According to what was observed during fieldwork in Morin Dawa Daur Autonomous Banner and based on the language use data summarized in Tables 7 and 8, Daur individuals mainly use Daur at home, while they use Chinese or a mixture of Daur and Chinese in other domains such as with friends and neighbours, at school, or in the workplace. Some interviewees indicated that they believed that the main reason Daur is unable to cover the full range of social settings is the lack

of a unified and widespread written system, which constrains its use in educational, trade, public signage, and other domains. It is worth noting that displaying ethnic languages on local public signage could motivate speakers to actively use and engage with their languages, thereby supporting intergenerational transmission (Du & Coluzzi, 2024). The third key EGIDS question is related to the response to the first question, and the results indicate that not all parents or grandparents are transmitting Daur to their children or grandchildren; indeed, some of the younger respondents have partially or entirely lost the ability to speak Daur language. Further, when comparing the two age groups, it is evident that a language shift from Daur to a mixture of Daur and Chinese is occurring, with some interviewees indicating that they believe that this trend is unavoidable. The fifth key question which should be asked in this case is 'What is the youngest generation of proficient speakers?' which aims to determine whether Daur is at Level 6b, 7, 8a, or 8b. The findings indicate that the youngest generation with some level of proficiency in Daur appears to be the children. Regarding official use (key question 2), the results indicate that Daur enjoys some official support from governments, as shown by the existence of Daur language television and radio programs but does not enjoy any official status. As for literacy status (key question 4), Daur lacks this altogether, partly due to its being an oral language lacking a unified and standard written system (Gaowa et al., 2022; Sa, 2019).

The analysis, along with Figure 3, demonstrates that the Daur in Inner Mongolia is at vitality level 6b, categorized as endangered. This indicates that Daur is still used orally between generations, but transmission to children by the childbearing generation is only occurring partially. These findings align with those of Daobu (2005) and Sun (2006), both of whom highlighted the endangered status of Daur in China and the imminent threats it faces. The answer to the first research question is, therefore, that the vitality level of Daur in this region, according to this analysis, is relatively low.

5.2 Factors Contributing to Its Relatively Low Vitality

Overall, the Daur language can be considered to be endangered in Inner Mongolia. Although it still enjoys an acceptable degree of vitality in limited domains (mainly within the family), it is far from being as vital as other languages in Inner Mongolia such as Chinese and Mongolian. There are two major factors contributing to the language's relatively low vitality in this region. First, Daur is basically an oral language and there are no standardized and widespread written

systems for it. Even though many linguists, researchers, local and regional governments, and relevant organizations have taken action to attempt to maintain it, such as providing Daur learning programs and offering television and broadcasting programs in Daur, the use of Daur is still limited to the family setting, and it has a limited presence in written contexts, printed materials, education, mass media, public signs, digital resources and so on, as per the results presented above. Without a written form to document and preserve the language, its transmission depends entirely on family and community interactions. This situation poses greater difficulty in maintaining the Daur language and ensuring its continuation as a vital element of Daur culture for generations to come. The lack of a unified Daur writing system reduces its visibility in essential domains of public life, and restricts opportunities for language learning, cultural expression, and engagement with the language in forms of media other than those mentioned above. This results in a further decrease in use of the language and in motivation to maintain and promote it, resulting in a gradual shift from Daur towards Chinese and its dialects. The Daur population in Inner Mongolia is already small and has decreased even more due to emigration over the past few decades. According to the 2023 Census, they now make up only 0.36% of the total population of Inner Mongolia. As an oral language, intergenerational transmission of Daur typically relies on interactions within families and local communities, in which the younger generation acquires the language from the older generation. While the Daur people form small, close-knit communities, the small population size and the relatively low number of language users may weaken the drive for native speakers to transmit the language to younger generations, causing a decline in proficient speakers over time. In sum, the answer to the second research question is that a complex set of interrelated factors influences the vitality of Daur in this region..

6. Conclusion

Language vitality is a complex mechanism influenced by multiple factors, and the vitality of a language may vary within different areas and communities. According to the EGIDS analysis conducted in this study, the vitality of Daur in Inner Mongolia is classified as 6b, indicating that it is endangered. The likely main contributing factors are the absence of a unified and widespread writing system, the small population size, the relatively less abundant opportunities for language transmission, and decreasing motivation to transmit it. This situation deserves attention, since preserving ethnic languages is vital for maintaining cultural and linguistic diversity and ensuring

the continuity of linguistic heritage (Benmamoun et al., 2013; May, 2013). Having answered the two research questions, the following recaps some of the strategies suggested here to help to maintain Daur in Inner Mongolia. As discussed above, maintaining Daur requires collaborative efforts across multiple levels involving numerous stakeholders. First, regional and local officials, policymakers, and language planners could assist by enacting regulations which recognize and preserve the Daur language, allocating resources for educational materials and language documentation initiatives, and supporting the inclusion of the Daur language in public services, digital resources, mass media, and other settings. Second, linguists and researchers may be able to assist, especially in documenting and describing the Daur language, for example by creating and developing a Daur writing system, expanding the vocabulary to be more useful in modern contexts (modernization), describing its grammar, vocabulary, oral traditions, and cultural context, and creating videotapes, audiotapes, linguistic databases, archives, and written records, along with Chinese translations. They could also help by providing linguistic expertise and guidance to local Daur communities and collaborating with them to develop Daur language resources and educational materials such as textbooks, dictionaries, audio recordings, and digital resources for both educators and learners. Third, non-governmental organizations, grass-roots organizations and individuals could also aid language maintenance efforts by organizing Daur cultural events, festivals, and language-focused activities which promote the use and appreciation of the Daur language and encourage parents, grandparents, and older community members to speak Daur with the younger generation to promote intergenerational language transmission.

In conclusion, this study builds on the foundational work of Daobu (2005) and Sun (2006), who broadly categorized Chinese ethnic language vitality by considering factors such as population size, number of speakers, language use and attitudes, and institutional support. While their research provided valuable insights into the general status of ethnic languages, this study takes a different approach by focusing specifically on intergenerational transmission and utilizing the EGIDS framework. This more targeted and standardized framework allows for clearer comparisons between languages and communities, facilitating the tracking of shifts in language use over time. The significance of this research is grounded in its contribution to comparative research by suggesting methods for future potential case studies for evaluation of ethnic language vitality in China. Although the focus is on Daur in the context of Inner Mongolia,

the findings and strategies proposed here have broader implications. These insights could inform language planning initiatives for other ethnic languages facing similar challenges. Preventing the general ongoing language shift toward majority and global languages, as exemplified in research on the endangerment of an ethnic language in in Inner Mongolia, is a challenge faced by many regions and areas, making the maintenance efforts outlined in this research crucial.

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Appendix: Interview Questions

1. What is your age? What is your educational background?
2. What is your first language?
3. Which language(s) do you use most frequently in daily life?
4. Which language(s) do you use in different social domains?
5. What do you think about publications, TV programmes, mass media, etc., in the Daur language?