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Rossina Soyán

Portland State University, Soyanos@pdx.edu

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Citation Details

Soyan, R. (2020). Investigating the Needs of Foreign Language Learners of Tuvan. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2020.1791714>

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Investigating the Needs of Foreign Language Learners of Tuvan

Rossina Soyan

Department of Applied Linguistics, Portland State University, Portland, OR

Correspondence should be sent to Rossina Soyan, Department of Applied Linguistics, Portland State University, P.O. Box 751, Portland, OR, United States, 97207-0751. Email:

soyanros@pdx.edu

Investigating the Needs of Foreign Language Learners of Tuvan

Abstract

Where do you start the course design for a minority language? One starting point is identifying and surveying a community of possible learners. This paper explores the needs of learners of Tuvan, a language spoken primarily in the Republic of Tuva, Southern Siberia, Russia. The study was conducted in two steps: an online questionnaire (March 2019) and semi-structured interviews (April 2019). The results showed a limited interest in Tuvan as a foreign language (13 responses) on the one hand, but a long-standing one on the other, more than two decades in some cases. The identified learner needs fell into three broad categories: needs related to “throat” (overtone) singing; needs related to travelling to Tuva and surviving in a new environment; and needs unique to each participant (e.g., academic research). The study contributes to the underresearched issue of indigenous languages as objects of foreign language study.

Keywords: needs analysis, Tuvan, less commonly taught language, throat singing, materials development, minority language

Word count: 7377

Investigating the Needs of Foreign Language Learners of Tuvan

In Russia, the latest census from 2010 identified more than 170 languages (Federal Statistics Office, 2011) and 131 of them are in danger (<http://www.unesco.org/languages-atlas/>). The general trend is the decline of the number of people who speak indigenous languages of the Russian North, Siberia and Far East and the decline in the number of educational institutions where these languages are used as the languages of instruction even if they have an official status (Arefiev, 2015). In addition to Russian, there are 33 official regional languages, for example, Tuvan and Russian are the official languages in the Republic of Tuva and the official languages of the Republic of Khakassia are Russian and Khakas.

Studies on minority languages of Russia tend to focus on the following issues: the effects of language policy and planning on minority languages, their changing status as the language of instruction in schools, and the role of language in shaping ethnic identity. For example, Sokolova, Panikar and Beloshitskaya (2019) revealed the positive impact of legislation on the language situation in Komi and Sakha Republics of Russia. Guryev (2003) performed historical and pedagogical analysis of the role of the Yakut (Sakha) language as the language of instruction in the Republic of Sakha. Chevalier published studies on the role of minority languages in education not only for Sakha (2017), but also for Altai and Tuvan languages (2012). Namrueva (2018) surveyed young adults in Kalmykia and confirmed the gradual shift from the use of the indigenous Kalmyk language to the Russian language in various domains. Khilkhanova and Khilkhanov (2004) explored the connections between the native language and identity and came to the conclusion that Buryat ethnic identity has not been affected by the loss of the Buryat language.

The search in various academic databases shows that a learner needs analysis (LNA) for indigenous languages of Russia is an underresearched topic, and these languages of Russia are mostly invisible as foreign languages. Often indigenous languages spoken by a small number of speakers are considered to be interesting only to the native community. Therefore, LNA is seldom performed for learners outside the community, but sometimes external interest exists, as in the case of the Tuvan language.

Tuvan is a Turkic language spoken primarily in Tuva (Southern Siberia, Russia) which is rated as a “vulnerable language” (Chevalier, 2010; Sereedar, 2018). According to UNESCO Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger (<http://www.unesco.org/languages-atlas/>), a vulnerable language is a language still transmitted from generation to generation, spoken by children, but losing its domains of usage. While Tuvan is still viable as a first language, the discussion of its prospects to be learned as a foreign language has surfaced only in a few academic publications (Kungaa, 2018; Otyzbay, 2018; Sawada & Kurosawa, 2018).

On the one hand, Tuvan is widely researched and theses on various aspects of the language are defended regularly (e.g., Mongush, 2015; Siuriun, 2011; Tsetsegdar, 2013). On the other hand, this knowledge has not been transferred into teaching materials for foreign language speakers yet. The prospects of Tuvan to be learned as a foreign language by people outside the community are undermined by the scarcity of educational materials. This situation is another illustration of the general gap between language documentation and revitalization, or research and its application, typical for endangered languages (Penfield & Tucker, 2011; Shulist & Rice, 2019).

Thus, the reasons for choosing the Tuvan language as the object of the present study were its status as a vulnerable language which needs a boost in prestige to stop losing its domains of usage, the existence of the external interest in the Tuvan language as indicated in the study with Japanese learners of Tuvan (Sawada & Kurosawa, 2018), and the paucity of educational materials for people outside the Tuvan-speaking community. Investigating the needs of foreign language learners of Tuvan is instrumental for further course design and materials development. Considering how limited teachers' and students' time and resources are, it is essential to strive for course design geared toward students' needs. This makes a learner needs analysis the starting point to inform subsequent actions.

Language teaching programs start with LNA as a first step followed by “syllabus design, materials development, methodology and pedagogy, testing, and evaluation” (Chaudron et al., 2005, p. 225). Although not the only source of information influencing course design, LNA can be considered on par with the environment analysis and the explicit statement of theoretical principles for teaching and learning (Nation & Macalister, 2010). These three inquiries are often completed before articulating course goals, determining assessment tools, and choosing the most suitable instructional approach.

Including a consideration of learners' voices and needs began in the field of English for Specific Purposes (West, 1994). Since then research has focused on English, rather than on any other language. However, it is also necessary to conduct LNA for less commonly taught languages, including minority languages, which have fewer educational materials available. Since the number of potential learners of a minority language is limited, it is even more critical that these learners' needs be taken into account in designing teaching materials.

The first part of this paper discusses the role and use of LNA in applied linguistics. The second part describes the LNA design for Tuvan as a foreign language, analyses the results, and then explores their possible implications for course design and materials development. The study aims to illuminate the significance of LNA for minority languages in facilitating materials development and thus contributing to language preservation and maintenance.

Review of the Literature

The rise of LNA is connected with the communicative approach in teaching (Wilkins, 1976). LNA has gained popularity within the field of English for Specific Purposes and resulted in publications on the needs of various groups, such as academic and clinical needs of nursing students (Cameron, 1998), the language needs of foreign professional footballers in the Netherlands (Kellerman, Koonen, & van der Haagen, 2005), the English proficiency required for French mountain guides (Wozniak, 2010), and tasks for courses on Business Spanish (Serafini & Torres, 2015).

The main concerns in connection with performing LNA are the reliability of methods of data collection and sources (Long, 2005). The methodological limitations of LNA cannot be overcome completely, but they may be moderated through the triangulation of sources, e.g., collecting data from learners, teachers, domain experts, and exam results; or the triangulation of methods, collecting data using, e.g., open-ended interviews, carefully constructed questionnaires, observations, and case studies.

The choice of methods and sources for a needs analysis depends on the context. For example, to design a course on English for Academic Purposes, Braine (2001) used the syllabi created by other instructors and examples of students' writing assignments. The analysis of these

sources helped him to find out what was required of students to complete the assignments. Chaudron et al. (2005) conducted a needs analysis as part of a bigger project: “A Task-Based Approach to the Teaching of Korean as a Foreign Language.” The authors used the triangulation of methods combining an unstructured interview with a questionnaire. The interview results informed the design of the questionnaire and allowed the inclusion of more closed-response items. The answers to the questionnaire were tallied and notable answers were described in more detail. Ultimately, the needs analysis informed the choice of tasks to be included in teaching materials.

While these methods of data collection work within a university setting, different methods are required for individuals interested in less commonly taught languages, which are often absent from university course lists. In comparison to Korean, Tuvan is rarely studied as a foreign language. Yet some scholarship exists: three articles have been published. The first two describe the experience of teaching Tuvan as a foreign language at universities in Turkey as part of a degree in Turkology (Kungaa, 2018; Otyzbay, 2018). The third focuses on tutoring fans of throat singing in Japan (Sawada & Kurosawa, 2018). The appearance of these articles in 2018 may indicate the rise of interest in Tuvan as a foreign language.

In the first article, Kungaa (2018) documents how difficult it was to motivate Turkish students to learn Tuvan since the main future application of the language for them was academic research, and not all students wanted to stay in academia. Otyzbay (2018) outlines how differences between the cognate Tuvan and Turkish languages cause confusion for speakers of Turkish and names dictionaries, grammar textbooks and reading materials she uses in her courses. Sawada and Kurosawa (2018), in the third article, conducted a survey of their Japanese

tutees to determine what difficulties they encounter during Tuvan language instruction. The results showed that the respondents' primary interest was in throat singing and in understanding the song lyrics better. In their comments, some of the respondents complained about the lack of educational materials in Tuvan and the lack of accessible reading materials. The three articles indicate the existence of external interest in the Tuvan language and of some demand for developing materials for Tuvan as a foreign language and Tuvan for Specific Purposes. A more comprehensive survey combining a questionnaire and an interview is in order. The survey in English targeting English-speaking population (vs. Turkish students, Japanese tutees) may reveal different results.

Thus, the present study is aimed at answering two questions:

- 1) Is there an interest in learning Tuvan as a foreign language among English speakers?
- 2) What are the needs of foreign language learners of Tuvan among throat-singing enthusiasts?

Method

The study features a mixed survey approach, combining quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Data gathering consisted of two stages: first, the online questionnaire; next, two semi-structured interviews with current Tuvan learners.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire for the current study was adapted from Chaudron et al.'s (2005) and Sawada and Kurosawa's (2018) questionnaires. While the section about level of proficiency, social uses and skills was expanded, the questions about taking a language course and tutoring were deleted.

The first version was piloted with two volunteers--who are not members of the target population but have experience in survey research--and was revised based on their feedback. The final version of the questionnaire (see Appendix A) contained seven sections, including the Consent to Participate in the Research; Age Verification; Background Information; Social Uses of and Needs for Tuvan; Other Reasons for Studying Tuvan; and Final Section. The questionnaire combined closed (dichotomous, multiple choice, and Likert scale responses) and open-ended questions. The last section asked the questionnaire respondents to provide their email if they wanted to be contacted for a follow-up interview or if they wanted to be contacted with the results of the study and learning materials. Otherwise, the questionnaire responses were completely anonymous.

“The friend-of-a-friend” method (Leimgruber, 2016; Milroy, 1987) was adopted due the small target population. The questionnaire was made available to my two contacts in the US who know people interested in Tuva, mostly in Tuvan throat singing. My contacts answered the questionnaire and asked their friends to do the same. Additionally, the survey was published on a Facebook group devoted to throat singing (“Tuvan Music—Kargyraa, Xoomei, Sygyt,” n.d.) with more than 2,400 members from all over the world, including Tuvans and people from other countries. The interest group was active online; some of the group members had already tried to learn the language while others were showing interest in it. According to Damon Postle, one of the interviewees, “It’s a good online community of [throat-singing] learners. And people are always asking how the hell you learn the language.” Thus, the participants were primarily throat-singing enthusiasts. The questionnaire was accepting responses for one month through March 2019 and gathered 12 replies. The original solicitation to respond to the questionnaire served as a

winnowing tool--the only people who were asked to respond were people who had learned Tuvan as a foreign language or were interested in learning Tuvan in the future.

The Semi-Structured Interviews

The semi-structured interviews (Long, 2005) were aimed at understanding in more detail the experience of learning Tuvan as a foreign language, what type of situations were relevant to current Tuvan language learners, and what kind of educational materials they used or wished were available to them. The list of possible open-ended questions was grounded in prior research (Chaudron et al., 2005; Sawada & Kurosawa, 2018) and was compiled before the interviews (see Appendix B). Two interviews were conducted in April 2019 and took less than 30 minutes each. Both interviewees wished to be identified by their real names. The first interview was conducted with Damon Postle, a Tuvan music scholar. The second interview was conducted with Enrique Ugalde, a throat-singing performer known under the stage name Soriah.

The project was explained to the interviewees. They signed the consent form to participate in the study and agreed to have their interviews audio recorded. One interview was conducted via Skype, the other was done face-to-face. The interviewees were asked the same questions in the same order; however, some clarifying questions were added in the course of the interviews.

The interview recordings were transcribed and coded. Partial broad transcriptions were made since topics non-relevant to the research questions also emerged during the interviews. The transcribed data were coded using open coding methodology (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Emergent themes were identified during the first reading. The process was repeated several times to ensure intrarater reliability. Qualitative data analysis software was not used since the number and length

of interviews rendered software use unnecessary. To check the coding, a peer debriefing session was organized with an impartial colleague who confirmed and refined the identified themes. A draft version of the article was sent to the interviewees for member checking to ensure the accuracy of data interpretation.

Participants

The participants of the online questionnaire and the interviews were 13 adults interested in learning the Tuvan language. Twelve people responded to the questionnaire, and two people were interviewed. One of the participants (Damon Postle) took part in both the questionnaire and the interview. The sample included eight men and five women. Table 1 contains the information about the participants' gender, age range, and first language(s). An interest in the Tuvan language and culture was shared across gender. The majority of respondents were aged between 41 to 65. Ten respondents indicated English as their first language, which was expected since the survey was administered in English.

[Table 1 near here]

All participants except one had studied foreign languages achieving varying degrees of proficiency - from novice to fluent. The list was too long to be included in Table 1. The most popular foreign languages were Spanish and Tuvan with seven people studying both languages. The other languages were Altai, Chinese, English, French, German, Hungarian, Japanese, Kazakh, Russian, Swedish, and Turkish.

Results

The Questionnaire

The low number of responses to the questionnaire showed a limited interest in studying Tuvan as a foreign language. Receiving only 12 questionnaire responses would seem discouraging for any language program. However, in the context of Tuvan as a vulnerable language, getting this number of replies encourages further investigation. Thus, the response to the first research question was positive—there was an interest in studying Tuvan as a foreign language within the Tuvan throat-singing interest group.

As for the second research question, answers to several questions were compared and combined to identify learner needs. The Likert scale questions asked respondents to rate possible reasons for learning Tuvan on a 5-point scale, with 5 points being “of great importance” and 0 points being of “no importance at all.” The answers were summed and averaged, as shown in Table 2. Four reasons scored the highest. The main motivation to learn Tuvan was the desire to understand throat-singing lyrics with the minimum score of 3 for all the respondents. This reason was followed by the interest in understanding some aspects of the culture. The goal of using Tuvan when visiting Tuva was rated closely to performing throat-singing songs.

[Table 2 near here]

The question about the first encounter with the Tuvan language corroborates the results from Table 2. This question was included to identify relationship, if any, between the reasons for studying Tuvan with the point of entry into the culture. The majority named throat singing as the starting point, be it attending a concert (2 replies) or a workshop (1 reply), listening to the music (5 replies), or reading about Tuva (3 replies). The participants read *Tuva or Bust* by Ralph

Leighton, the book about the author's friendship with Richard Feynman, and *Where Mountains and Rivers Sing* by Theodore Levin, the book devoted to throat singing in Central Asia. Only one reply excluded throat singing as the point of entry into the culture - it was rather meeting somebody from Tuva that sparked interest.

As for the current uses of Tuvan, all six respondents who had studied Tuvan previously sometimes used the language with their friends. All the other possible contacts (e.g., Tuvan family members, throat-singing teachers) were relevant to no more than one respondent. The participants also added their own social uses of Tuvan: "to educate people about my three trips to Tuva," to use "bits and pieces in the [throat-singing] workshops or on Facebook," "I helped start Tuvan Wikipedia and translated the interface," "I use it with students I teach about Tuva," "I use my few words among Tuvans." Thus, the Tuvan language is used not only to communicate with Tuvan-speaking people, but also to inform non-Tuvan-speaking people about Tuva.

As for the possible future uses, people chose multiple answers. They wanted to know more Tuvan to be able to talk with their friends (9 replies), to establish professional contacts (3 replies), to talk to Tuvan-speaking family members (2 replies), to visit Tuva (1 reply), and to talk to "musicians on tour, other enthusiasts" (1 reply). Overall, the respondents would like to focus more on speaking (10 replies) and listening (9 replies) than reading (4 replies) and writing (3 replies).

The majority of the respondents had not visited Tuva, but those who had been there (4 respondents) had been there at least twice. Not all people were interested in visiting Tuva, but those who did want to go there (7 respondents) were interested in going as tourists (7), attending throat-singing events (6), visiting friends or relatives (4), and working as researchers (2).

Thus, the questionnaire showed that throat singing was the most common motivation for the interest in Tuvan. All of the main reasons for studying Tuvan are connected with throat singing, although the categories overlap to some extent.

The Semi-Structured Interviews

The interviews generated richer data confirming and adding depth to the questionnaire results. While both interviewees, Damon and Enrique, expressed their interest in learning Tuvan as a foreign language, they articulated their own reasons for this interest and followed their own paths in learning the language. Shared and unique themes were identified in the two interviews during open coding (Table 3).

[Table 3 near here]

Both interviewees listed personal interests and ideological convictions as reasons for learning Tuvan. Overall, the theme of music dominated in the interviews. The interviewees were both musicians. Their answers supported the strong connection between the interest in Tuvan and the interest in throat singing. For Enrique, the first encounter with Tuvan language and culture was “a mix tape [...] back in the 90s of the song Kongurei by Huun-Huur-Tu” (E. Ugalde). The spark was so strong that he started throat singing, visited Tuva ten times, and was planning his 11th trip to Tuva at the time of the interview. Damon also underlined that music was the driving force for him and his friends. “The thing is that for most of us Americans that are really interested in Tuvan, we land on it, we get there, we understand Tuva first because of the music” (D. Postle). Both interviewees expressed a strong emotional attachment to Tuva. “Honestly, I am gonna travel to Tuva as much as I can in my lifetime. I love it there” (D. Postle). This attachment was sustained over several years, even influencing career choices.

Although the interest in the language and culture started with the music and the deciphering of song lyrics, the moment the interviewees landed in Tuva, they understood they needed more conversational Tuvan. They wanted to achieve better communication with Tuvan speakers. For example, Enrique hoped to communicate in Tuvan with Tuvan people in general:

I perform before a lot of people, I would like to be able to talk to the people I perform for, I would like to be able to have actual relatable conversations with regular people who I meet in Tuva. (E. Ugalde)

Another common theme in the interviews was language maintenance, which surfaced without prompts. Damon underlined the value of the Tuvan language in preserving the culture. The theme appeared during the discussion of the wish-list for educational materials, “Any kind of app. Even some basic conversational Tuvan, and it’s hard because there’s not a whole lot of conversational Tuvan speakers out there. As far as preservation of the language it’s crucial, and the preservation of the culture” (D. Postle).

In Enrique’s interview, the theme of language maintenance emerged during the discussion of social uses of the Tuvan language. Enrique wanted to use the language to communicate with his son, his friends, and other people he met in Tuva. Then, he compared the Tuvan language with the fate of other Siberian languages:

It seems that even in Tuva it is beginning to be disregarded. It is being sacrificed for Russian. For this idea of contemporization. So, I think it’s important to maintain this language, this heritage. Many other surrounding cultures have been thrown to the wayside. It’s unfortunate. (E. Ugalde)

Enrique concluded his thoughts about the current role of the Tuvan by explaining his personal reasons for learning Tuvan and comparing it to the Russian language:

I think it's important to learn, I think it's important to maintain. Even though myself I am not Tuvan, my son is. I want to let him know that I value his heritage and his culture. By speaking the language, that's a very powerful way of conveying that. To him and to everybody else. If somebody knows Tuvan, they are like wow. Nobody knows Tuvan. No outsiders know Tuvan, especially Russians. Russians don't know Tuvan. And it's unfortunate that a lot of Tuvans don't know Tuvan. (E. Ugalde)

All the reasons for learning Tuvan seem intertwined. The interest in throat singing led to numerous trips to Tuva for both interviewees; the time in Tuva led to the desire to communicate with new acquaintances in Tuvan; communication in Tuvan led to the awareness of the importance of preserving the vulnerable language.

However, the interviewees also named separate reasons for learning Tuvan. For example, Damon was interested in the Tuvan language to complete research into the methodology of teaching throat singing:

I am working with Igor Koshkendei, Aidysmaa Koshkendei, Choduraa Tumat, Andrei Mongush, Mongun-ool Ondar. I am learning how they learned how to do national music. And then I am also learning their methodology, doing a comparative analysis of their methodologies, how they teach. (D. Postle)

For Enrique, focus on pronunciation was crucial, "For me it's mostly about the proper phonetic pronunciation. Especially because I compete. If I am able to go there and sound just like a Tuvan, then it's successful" (E. Ugalde).

The interviewees tried to learn Tuvan in distinct ways. Damon had been mostly studying on his own and asking his Tuvans friends to help him figure out the grammar and vocabulary. Enrique had a few Tuvan classes with a group of foreigners during the first international throat-singing camp in 2007. Both underlined the paucity of educational materials for Tuvan as a foreign language and wished there was an app, a primer, or a grammar book accessible to non-linguists and available online for self-study. The interviews confirmed Kungaa's (2018), Otyzbay's (2018), and Sawada and Kurosawa's (2018) comments about educational materials, where the scarcity of resources and their inaccessibility were constant themes.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to find out if there was an interest in learning Tuvan as a foreign language among English speakers and what learner needs might be within the throat-singing interest group. The research aim was motivated by the context of the Tuvan as a vulnerable language spoken by a small number of people, the evidence of the existence of external interest in the language, and the paucity of educational materials for foreign language speakers. The study fills a gap in providing a needs analysis of a less commonly taught language and identifies the directions for materials development. The study illustrates how critical it is to reach out to a possible learner population since the more limited the number of learners, the more tailored language materials should be. The methodology included an online questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The study was conducted in English, as compared to Sawada and Kurosawa's (2018) paper where all participants' first language was Japanese. Although the learner populations were different, the study confirmed the previous findings, as well as revealed new learner needs.

Practical Contributions

The study showed that there was only a limited interest in learning Tuvan as a foreign language among the English-speaking Tuvan throat-singing community (13 participants), but the interest was highly focused on throat singing, the most famous export from Tuva to the globalized world. The questionnaire revealed three categories of needs: needs related to throat singing, needs related to traveling to Tuva, and needs unique to each respondent. The participants were recruited through a Tuvan throat-singing interest group, and the mere fact that an English-speaking throat-singing interest group exists may indicate that the learner needs related to throat singing are not accidental. To the best of my knowledge, it was the only way to reach a broader number of potential Tuvan learners.

The study participants want to understand the song lyrics and the Tuvan culture, to read and pronounce the words in the songs appropriately, to attend throat-singing events, to perform throat singing, and to attend or conduct throat-singing workshops. The needs related to throat singing can be classified as the first category of needs, and these needs might be unique for the Tuvan language and culture. In contrast to the first category, the second category might be considered universal to foreign language learners since these needs arise from the needs of travelling to a foreign country and culture. These needs include the desire to be more independent while visiting Tuva, i.e., rely less on the help of friends and to be able to communicate with Tuvan-speaking people. The third category of learner needs includes idiosyncratic needs, mostly unique to each respondent, such as understanding online content in Tuvan and contributing to it, conducting academic research, and contributing to language maintenance. Although the vulnerability of the language was a secondary reason for learning

Tuvan, it seemed to grow in strength with the number of years spent visiting Tuva. Damon, who had travelled to Tuva twice, mentioned this theme in just one sentence; Enrique, who had visited Tuva ten times, spent four minutes explaining why the maintenance of the Tuvan language was important to him. The other idiosyncratic need is using the language to explain Tuva to non-Tuvan-speaking people. Thus, the language maintenance, research into the Tuvan culture, and spread of knowledge about Tuva are the themes in the third category of learner needs.

The results of this study have direct pedagogical implications. The people interested in learning Tuvan, although they were quite dedicated, were too limited in number. Any educational resources should be available online for free, since they cannot survive as commercial projects. Learners could then be located anywhere in the world, in any time zone. While the materials with free access could be developed as part of a time-limited project, constant supervision may be too demanding. The strategies for long time sustainability without the direct involvement of a materials developer should be carefully assessed as to feasibility. For example, materials could be self-study materials with answer keys or automated feedback (alternatively, peer feedback).

More attention needs to be paid to materials development since the continuing scarcity of educational resources may eventually undermine the motivation to learn the language. Two avenues for materials development are possible. The recurrent theme of Tuvan music as the first and main motivation for learning Tuvan can be mirrored in the first type of materials. Seeing instruction as Tuvan for Specific Purposes, materials can be focused on reading the song lyrics, listening to the songs, and understanding the grammar and syntax through the genre of songs.

The second avenue is developing materials for conversational Tuvan with the topic of visiting Tuva foremost. Although the first encounter with the Tuvan language started for many respondents with throat singing, the further uses of Tuvan were similar to other foreign languages, such as ordering a meal in a cafe, establishing and maintaining contacts with local people, and being culturally aware.

The study shows the utility of identifying relevant points of contact for foreign language speakers. LNA can serve as a tool for reaching out to a potential learner population. While the Tuvan language is relevant to outsiders due to throat singing, other minority languages of Russia may benefit from reflecting similarly on the likely points of contact that potential learners have had with their languages.

It can be theorized that the results of a needs analysis for other minority languages of Russia would only partially coincide with the results of the Tuvan LNA (such as needs related to travelling to a foreign country and culture). Needs related to throat singing may turn out to be unique for the Tuvan language, although learners of other adjacent languages need to be surveyed since throat singing is part of many Central Asian cultures.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

As for the limitations of the study, first, it is based on self-reported data from self-selected participants. The results of the study cannot be generalized to the wider population due to contextual constraints. However, I relied both on survey data and interview results for drawing conclusions. Another limitation was the fact that six out of twelve questionnaire respondents had never learned Tuvan before; thus, they were “pre-experience learners” and they may be unaware of their language needs. Still, the impressive list of the foreign languages from the background

section of the questionnaire leads to the conclusion that the participants are experienced foreign language learners.

Despite its limitations, this study suggests trends in the development of educational materials. The next step is to apply the insights gained from the study to select the appropriate content and to sequence activities in teaching materials. A possible further avenue of research is conducting a task-based needs analysis to identify tasks Tuvan learners need to accomplish in everyday life using Tuvan. These tasks can be further transformed into a full-scale task-based curriculum.

While the results of the study are limited to the needs of Tuvan language learners, it is possible that similar articles on other minority languages of Russia will be published afterwards. The significance of this article is in defining a possible starting point in course design and materials development for minority languages. The article shows that the issue of limited number of participants can be overcome through designing a mixed methods study and employing the “friend-of-a-friend” methodology in data collection.

The study highlights the role of minority languages as foreign languages with their own population of learners and reiterates the necessity to conduct empirical research to aid further materials development. This type of research may increase access to minority languages and aid in their preservation and maintenance.

Conclusion

Course designs based on LNA are critical for less commonly taught languages, including minority languages, which have a limited number of learners. Identifying possible learners, asking them what they want to accomplish, and responding to these needs represent viable

strategies for materials development. Although learner needs change constantly, common themes and other findings may be revealed in a full survey. The LNA here proved successful in identifying a community of learners and assessing their needs. It revealed their common interests, their commitment, and their emotional attachment to the Tuvan language and culture. The next step is meeting the identified learner needs through materials development. Investigating the needs of foreign language learners of vulnerable and less commonly taught languages will contribute to their use and maintenance and may even enhance the prestige of the language among the indigenous community.

Acknowledgements

The research for the paper was financially supported by the James R. Nattinger Endowed Fellowship.

Declaration of Interest Statement

The author declares there is no conflict of interest.

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Appendix A

Abridged version of the online questionnaire

Section 1 of 7: Welcome

Section 2 of 7: Consent to participate in research

Section 3 of 7: Age verification

Section 4 of 7: Background Information

1. Gender: F... M... Other...

2. Age: 18 to 25 26 to 40 41 to 65 65 and older

3. Native language(s):

4. Have you ever learned a foreign language? Yes (please specify below)... No...

5. If your answer to question 4 is yes, please specify the language(s) and the level of proficiency.

6. What was your first encounter with the Tuvan language and culture?

- Attended a throat-singing concert
- Listened to throat-singing music
- Read a book about Tuva
- Met somebody from Tuva
- Other (please specify below)

7. If your answer to question 6 is other, please specify.

8. Have you ever studied Tuvan? Yes (please specify below) ... No...

9. If your answer to question 8 is yes, please indicate your level of proficiency:

beginner - I know some phrases and most common words in Tuvan

intermediate - I can have conversations in Tuvan on everyday topics: weather, hobbies, daily routines, food, transportation

advanced - I can have conversations in Tuvan on various topics of local, national and international interest

Section 5 of 7: Social Uses of and Needs for Tuvan

10. If you have never studied Tuvan, skip this question. Do you ever use Tuvan with family member, friends or professional contacts?

Family member always often sometimes never

Friends always often sometimes never

Professional contacts always often sometimes never

Others always often sometimes never

11. If you use Tuvan with Others, please specify.

12. Would you like to know Tuvan (or more Tuvan) so that you could use it (or use it more) with any of these people? (Circle ALL that apply):

Family members Friends Professional contacts Others (please specify below)

13. If you answered Others to the previous question, please specify.

14. If you were to study Tuvan, what skills would you like to focus on primarily?

Listening Reading Speaking Writing

15. Have you ever visited Tuva? Yes (please specify below)... No...

16. If your answer to question 15 is yes, how many times? and, on average, for how long?

17. Do you think you will visit Tuva (or visit Tuva again)? Yes... No...

18. Why did you and/or will you visit Tuva? (check all that apply)

Born there To visit friends or relatives Tourism/vacation

Throat-singing events For business/ work For academic research

Other reasons (please specify below)

19. If you chose Other reasons, please specify.

Section 6 of 7: Other Reasons for Studying Tuvan

20. Which of the following are reasons why you are studying or would like to study Tuvan, and how important is each of them to you?

5 = great importance, 3 = average importance, 1 = minor importance, 0 = no importance to you

Please respond to every item, including those that are of no importance to you.

Communicate better with family members and friends	5	4	3	2	1	0
Satisfy your interest in some aspect(s) of Tuvan culture	5	4	3	2	1	0
Understand the lyrics of throat-singing songs	5	4	3	2	1	0
Perform throat-singing songs	5	4	3	2	1	0
Use in present or future academic work	5	4	3	2	1	0
Use when visiting Tuva	5	4	3	2	1	0
Other (please specify below)	5	4	3	2	1	0

21. If your answer to question 19 is Other reasons, please specify.

22. Does this statement apply to you?

“I am studying Tuvan for no particular reason.” Yes... No...

Section 7 of 7: Thank you!

If you have any comments on the survey or the project, please leave a comment below.

Please include your email if you want to be contacted with the results of the study and teaching materials.

Please include your email if you want to be contacted for a follow-up interview.

Appendix B

Questions for the semi-structured interviews with learners

I. Background information

Age, native language(s), experience in learning foreign languages

II. Tuvan as a foreign language

1. What was your first encounter with the Tuvan language and culture?
2. Why do you want to study Tuvan?
3. If you have studied Tuvan, what is your level of proficiency?
4. How long have you been studying Tuvan?
5. Who were your teachers?
6. In what kind of situations do you think you are going to use Tuvan? Name at least three.
7. What kind of educational materials did you find useful in learning Tuvan?
8. What kind of educational materials you wish were available?

Table 1

Participants' background information

<u>Category</u>	<u>Subcategory</u>	<u>The number of participants</u> <u>(n=13)</u>
Gender	female	5
	male	8
Age range	18-25	2
	26-40	1
	41-65	8
	65 or older	2
First language(s)	Afrikaans, English*	1
	Catalan	1
	English	10
	Japanese	1

*The bilingual person appears only once

Table 2

Reasons for studying Tuvan

<u>Reasons</u>	<u>Min</u>	<u>Max</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>
Understand the lyrics of throat-singing songs	3	5	4.25	0.75
Satisfy your interest in some aspect(s) of Tuvan culture	0	5	3.75	1.54
Use when visiting Tuva	0	5	3.50	1.73
Perform throat-singing songs	0	5	3.25	1.91
Communicate better with family members and friends	0	5	1.75	1.96
Use in present or future academic work	0	5	1.42	1.68
Other reasons	0	5	0.83	1.75

Table 3

Shared and unique themes in the two interviews

	<u>Shared themes</u>	<u>Unique themes</u>	
		<u>Damon</u>	<u>Enrique</u>
Reasons for learning Tuvan	- interest in throat singing - travelling - communication - language maintenance	- research	- pronunciation / performance