COMPARATIVE RESEARCH INTO THE LANDSCAPE VOCABULARY IN THE MONGOLIAN LANGUAGES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF LANGUAGE CONTACTS

PESQUISA COMPARATIVA DO VOCABULÁRIO DE PAISAGEM NAS LÍNGUAS MONGÓLICAS NA PERSPECTIVA DE CONTATOS LINGUÍSTICOS

INVESTIGACIÓN COMPARATIVA DEL VOCABULARIO DEL PAISAJE EN LAS LENGUAS MONGOLAS DESDE LA PERSPECTIVA DE LOS CONTACTOS LINGÜÍSTICOS

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ABSTRACT: The article looks at language contacts between the Kalmyk language and the language of Oirats living in Mongolia in the sphere of lexis. The lexical layer analyzed in the article is landscape vocabulary. For comparison, materials from the old-written Mongolian, Khalkha-Mongolian, and Buryat languages were used. The presence of similar words testifies the existence of the so-called general Mongolian layer and the former one people separated in time and space.


RESUMO: O artigo analisa os contatos linguísticos entre a língua Kalmyk e a língua dos Oirats que vivem na Mongólia na esfera do léxico. A camada lexical analisada no artigo é o vocabulário da paisagem. Para comparação, foram usados materiais das línguas mongol, Khalkha-Mongol e Buryat, escritas antigas. A presença de palavras semelhantes atesta a existência da chamada camada geral da Mongólia e de um povo outrora uno separado no tempo e no espaço.


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RESUMEN: El artículo analiza los contactos lingüísticos entre el idioma Kalmyk y el idioma de Oirats que viven en Mongolia en la esfera del léxico. La capa léxica analizada en el artículo es el vocabulario del paisaje. A modo de comparación, se utilizaron materiales de los idiomas mongol, khalkha-mongol y buriato escritos en la antigüedad. La presencia de palabras similares atestigua la existencia de la llamada capa mongola general y la una vez que las personas se separaron en el tiempo y el espacio.


Introduction

This article was written within the international project implemented by the Russian Foundation for Basic Research and the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science of Mongolia. It focuses on comparative research into the interaction between languages in polycultural space using the material of close language variants — the Kalmyk language and the language of Oirats living in Mongolia, which developed under different circumstances and contacted with different languages. The defining role in the development of the modern Kalmyk language and the language of Oirats living in Mongolia belongs to the influence of language contacts with the Russian, Turkic, and Khalkha-Mongolian languages.

The ancestors of the speakers of the Kalmyk language and the language of Oirats living in Mongolia made up the North-Western area of the Mongolian languages located in Central Asia, having blended with the Turkic tribes who inhabited these areas and formed a group of proto-Mongolian tribes called “the Shiwei” by historians. Later this group fell into three large ethnic groups: Oirat, Buryat, and Khalkha. By the time Genghis Khan founded the Mongol Empire, Oirats had still been members of diverse tribes, each of which retained its idiom characterized by both general and specific Oirat features. After the collapse of the Yuan Empire, Oirats were joined for a short time within the Dzungar Khanate, while a part of Oirats migrated to the Volga plains and established the Kalmyk Khanate there. Later, they acquired Russian citizenship and became part of the Russian Federation. It has been over 400 years since Kalmyks started experiencing the ever-growing influence of the Russian language on their language. Another part of Oirats within ethnic groups of the Derbet, Torgut, Khoshut, Myangad, Olot, Bayad, Zakhchin, and other tribes remained on the territory of North-Western Mongolia and experienced strong influence from the Khalkha language. Some Oirats were relocated to Xinjiang, where they were under a strong influence of the language of local Turkic peoples, Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and the Chinese. A small share of Oirats living in Xinjiang adopted Islam
and were driven out of Kirghizia to the Issyk-Kul region, where they have lived up to the present day. However, by now, they have completely lost their language and use the Kirghiz language. Among Oirats’ language contacts, the oldest are contacts with Turkic languages and the most important for their current state — with Russian for the Kalmyk language and Khalkha-Mongolian for the Oirats in Western Mongolia.

Methods

To find and clarify the differences between the Kalmyk language and the language of Oirats living in Mongolia in terms of their structure, it is important to compare these languages from the perspective of identification of their general Mongolian foundation underlying their lexis. In this work, the lexical layer describing landscape is analyzed. The specific features of the Oirat area are identified, as well as the features characteristic of the Kalmyk language, and the language of Oirats living in Mongolia.

Lexis, phonetics, and grammar of any language represent the main sections of its structure. The specific features of the material, domestic, and spiritual culture of a certain ethnic group are recreated through lexical units — this is how vocabulary is formed. Research into the landscape lexis layer is significant from the perspective of the history of language development and formation.

Comparative-historical research of this lexical layer of the Western area of the Mongolian languages can provide us with new factual material for the identification of landscape lexis on the general Mongolian level and within this area.

The principal contribution to studies of language in its relation to ethnic culture was made by the following scientists: E. Vandui (1962; 1965), Zh. Tsoloo (1965; 1988), Kh. Luvsanbaldan (1975), O. Sambuudorzh (1996), Zh. Buyandalai (1996), V.I. Rassadin (2010; 2013), L.D. Shagdarov and Cheremisov (2010a; 2010b), and others.

Presently, linguists, ethnologists, and historians are compiling a consistent corpus of traditional lexis, reconstructing ethnographic concepts, and creating dictionaries of archaic lexis and dialects of Mongolian peoples.

Judging by the source base of Mongolian languages, the collection of lexical material has had a long history. Mongolian languages came into view of European researchers in the 17th century. At that time, scientific perception of the history and language of Mongolian peoples was developed by participants in different expeditions, for example, Ph.J. Stralenberg (1730).
As far as lexis describing inanimate nature is concerned, it has been the subject of research into Mongolian languages (RASSADIN, 2015; RASSADIN; TROFIMOVA, 2010).

The issues of interaction between the modern Kalmyk language and the language of Oirats living in Western Mongolia involved the phonetic and morphological structure of these languages while their lexis was not studied from the perspective of the comparative approach to identify common lexical equivalents present in both languages.

In the course of studying the Mongolian languages of the Western area, we used “BNMAU dakh mongol khelnii nutgiin ayalguuny tol bichig. II. Oird ayalguu” [Dictionary of Mongolian dialects in the People's Republic of Mongolia. The Oirat dialect] by Zh. Tsoloo (1988), the four-volume “Bolshoi akademicheskii mongolsko-russkii slovar” [The Great Academic Mongolian-Russian Dictionary”] (2001a; 2001b; 2001c; 2002), and “Kalmytsko-russkii slovar” [The Kalmyk-Russian Dictionary] (1977), ensuring comprehensiveness and objectivity of the compared lexical material. Apart from that, we used our observations gathered during our trips to Oirat settlements in Western Mongolia.

On this premise, it is considered reasonable to obtain new data from the Kalmyk language and the language of Oirats living in Mongolia to identify their lexical similarities.

Results

The findings show that the modern Kalmyk language has changed its lexical structure only to a small degree and retains the specific features of the Oirat language area.

For example, the Kalmyk and Oirat-Mongolian words өлкө, “world, earth, universe”, өлкө өөр “in the whole world, all over the world”, өлкө эрээ “around the world” (old-written Mongolian delekei, Mongolian өлөхийт, Buryat өлөх) are of Mongolian origin.

In the Kalmyk language and the language of Oirats living in Mongolia, several words belong to the landscape lexis that are of general Mongolian nature. All these words are fixed in the Old Mongolian language. For instance, the Kalmyk word уул “mountain”, цаста уул “snowy mountains”, уул эклцдән мөштөг, һөл эклцдән өөр “the mountain is low at its beginning, and the river is shallow at its head” (old-written Mongolian aγula, Khalkha-Mongolian уул “mountain, mountains, mountain range”, Buryat уула).

The Kalmyk and Oirat-Mongolian words хада “cliff, rock”, хадын көңө “cave in a rock”, хада чөлүү “stone-cliff”, хадын дүүрө харта өөр Кинасгү хамёң хада оркв “Jangar hewed Kinyas and his black horse similar to a rock” (old-written Mongolian qada, Buryat хады).
As for the word таг “plateau; the flat summit of a mountain”, it can be found in the old-written Mongolian language with the meaning “mountain plateau; mountain with a flat top”, while in modern Mongolian languages, there is no such a word. As V.I. Rassadin writes,

This word exists in the Buryat language in the form харьдаг and means ‘woodless mountain top’. The highest mountain in the Tunkinsky District of Buryatia, within the Tunkinsky mountain range, is Мункхэ-сардаγ (Buryat: Мүнхэ-тардаг), covered with permanent snow. The specific feature of this mountain range is that its summits consist of yellow rock, which explains the Turkic origin of the corresponding word. The components of this Mongolian lexical unit — sarıday — are represented by two elements — sari and day, which can be well interpreted as the Turkic words sarı “yellow” and day “mountain” (RASSADIN, 2015, p. 84).

In the Khalkha-Mongolian and Buryat languages, there is a word хяр, which means “hillcrest, top of the head, mountain range, foothill” and, correspondingly, хяра meaning “mountain crest” (qir-a in the old Mongolian script). In the modern Kalmyk language and the language of Oirats living in Mongolia, this word cannot be found.

The Kalmyk and Oirat-Mongolian word боомо газар “heavy-going place” (old-written Mongolian боγут, Khalkha-Mongolian боом, Buryat боомо газар “cape, outstanding mountain”). V.I. Rassadin assumes that “[…] this Mongolian word was derived from the Mongolian verb боγу ‘block, obstruct, cut off, hamper’, which also has the meaning ‘tie up, tie around, wrap up’” (RASSADIN, 2015, p. 85).

The Kalmyk and Oirat-Mongolian word булы “grave, repository, graveyard” (old-written Mongolian булаγи, Khalkha-Mongolian булу “grave-mound; grave, graveyard, burying ground, cemetery”, Buryat булаγа “gravestones, grave-mound, grave, graveyard”). V.I. Rassadin writes, “The internal form of this word consists of the components була and ши, where ши is nothing but a usual deverbal word-formative common Mongolian affix, while the була component can be identified with the Mongolian verb була” (RASSADIN, 2015, p. 83). A few examples: Khalkha-Mongolian булах, Buryat булаха “embed, bury”, Kalmyk була “cover, embed, earth, bury” with the meaning “earth, cover, embed, fill up with”.

In the old days, Mongolian nomadic peoples cooked meat in the following way: they made a fire and a hole under the fire, where they dug meat, and thus it was cooked there.

The Kalmyk and Oirat-Mongolian word довун “small hill, mount, elevation” can be found in the old-written Mongolian language тобунг “small hill, mount, elevation” (Mongolian товон “mount”, Buryat довун “elevation, hill, hillock, burial mount”). These Mongolian words are in the same semantic field though phonetically they are not identical.
The Kalmyk and Oirat-Mongolian word җалһă “ravine, valley” (Khalkha-Mongolian  жалга “clough, ravine, narrow, hollow, valley; gorge, trench; gully; cavity”, Buryat жалга “valley, hollow; clough, ravine, clough, gorge, trench”), old-written Mongolian jilγ-a ← *jilγa. Ravines are a kind of a hollow, at the bottom of which there might be a stream.

The Kalmyk and Oirat-Mongolian word тала “open space, field, plain” (Khalkha-Mongolian тал “field, open space; area, place», Buryat тала “field, steppe, plain, open space”), old-written Mongolian tal-a with the same meaning.

The Kalmyk and Oirat-Mongolian word цецĕглĕг “flower garden” (Khalkha-Mongolian цэцэглэг “flower garden, garden”, Buryat сэсэглиг “blooming”), old-written Mongolian čečeglig, made up of the root цэцэг “flower” (Khalkha-Mongolian цэцэг, Buryat сэсэг) and the affix lig. Khalkha-Mongolian цэрртэг “garden, greenhouse, flower garden” and Buryat сэсэрлиг “flower garden, rarely “flower bed”.

The Kalmyk and Oirat-Mongolian word өл “desert” (Khalkha-Mongolian үл “desert, deserted, unpeopled”, Buryat сүл “deserted”, сүл газар, сүл губи “desert”), old-written Mongolian Ժл with the same meaning.

The Kalmyk and Oirat-Mongolian word тәрәлһĕн “planting, seeding; field, ploughland” (Khalkha-Mongolian тариалан “ploughland, field, planting”, Buryat таряалан “ploughland”), old-written Mongolian tarijalang with the same meaning ← *tariγalang, consisting of two components *tariγ and -alang.

Landscape gets certain shades due to some natural phenomena. The sharply continental climate in the areas where Kalmyks and Mongolian Oirats live is rich in natural phenomena, which is reflected in the language: for example, the Kalmyk and Oirat-Mongolian word хурă (Khalkha-Mongolian бороо(н), Buryat бороо), old-written Mongolian boruγ=a. Examples: асха дорсăн хур, илүү уюу орсăн хур “torrential rain”.

The Kalmyk and Oirat-Mongolian word цасăн “snow” (Khalkha-Mongolian цас “snow”, Buryat cahan “snow”), old-written Mongolian ĉasun “snow”. Examples: цаснаас цасын саңната, цуснас улан халхта “Her forehead is whiter than snow, her cheeks are brighter than blood”.

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The Kalmyk and Oirat-Mongolian word солана “rainbow” (Khalkha-Mongolian солонго(н) “rainbow”, Buryat холонго “rainbow”), old-written Mongolian solungγ=a “rainbow”.

Examples: солана солантааржана “rainbow appeared”.

The Kalmyk and Oirat-Mongolian word сальн “wind” (Khalkha-Mongolian салхи(н) “wind”, Buryat халхин “wind”), old-written Mongolian salki “wind”. Examples: сальн хурдан, салькнас санан хурдан “wind is fast, and desire is even faster than wind”.

The Kalmyk and Oirat-Mongolian word мөндөр “hail” (Khalkha-Mongolian мөндөр “hail”, Buryat мүндэр “hail”), old-written Mongolian mӧndür “hail”. Examples: күчтә мөндөр өрв “there has been heavy hail”.

The Kalmyk and Oirat-Mongolian word шуур “snowstorm” (Khalkha-Mongolian шуурга(н) “blizzard, snowstorm; windstorm; typhoon, snow blast”, Buryat шуурга(н) “blizzard, snowstorm; windstorm; typhoon, snow blast”), old-written Mongolian šiγurγa “blizzard, snowstorm; windstorm; typhoon, snow blast”. Examples: шуур шуурчана “there is a snowstorm”.

Conclusion

The considered layer of landscape lexis in the Kalmyk language and the language of Oirats living in Mongolia testifies that these languages have retained the specific features characterizing the lexis of the North-Western language area and entered the vocabulary of these languages as common Mongolian words lying at the core of these languages throughout the evolution of the Oirat tribes.

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