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

Svetlana Menkenovna TROFIMOVA1
Valentina Lidzhievna BOKTAeva2
Dzhirgala Nikolaevna OVRAEVA3
Bayarma Dashidondokovna BALZHINIMAEVA4
Byambazhav TUGSHINTOGS5

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.

KEYWORDS: Language contacts. Kalmyk language. Language of Oirats in Mongolia. Old-written Mongolian language. Landscape lexis.

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 separado no tempo e no espaço.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Contatos de idiomas. Linguagem Kalmyk. Língua de Oirats na Mongólia. Língua mongol antiga escrita. Léxico da paisagem.

1 Kalmyk State University named after B.B. Gorodovikov, Elista, Russia. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1812-7117. E-mail: svetlana.m.trofimova@mail.ru
2 Kalmyk State University named after B.B. Gorodovikov, Elista, Russia. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4471-5804. E-mail: Valentina.L.Boktaeva@yandex.ru
3 Kalmyk State University named after B.B. Gorodovikov, Elista, Russia. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1834-1826. E-mail: D.Ovraeva@yandex.ru
4 Buryat State University named after D. Banzarov, Ulan-Ude, Russia. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6852-7835. E-mail: Balzhinimayeva@yandex.ru
5 Mongolian State University, Ulan Bator, Mongolia. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6884-7951. E-mail: Byambadhav@yandex.ru
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.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Contactos lingüísticos. Idioma kalmuko. Lengua de Oirats en Mongolia. Idioma mongol escrito en la antigüedad. Léxico del paisaje.

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, Zakchchin, 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. Tsoolo (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 делкә, “world, earth, universe”, делкә deep “in the whole world, all over the world”, делкә эргәд “around the world” (old-written Mongolian delekei, Mongolian дэлхий, Buryat дэлхы) 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 экидэн майтэ, һол экидэн хэр “the mountain is low at its beginning, and the river is shallow at its head” (old-written Mongolian. аγula, Khalkha-Mongolian уул “mountain, mountains, mountain range”, Buryat уулд) .

The Kalmyk and Oirat-Mongolian words хадă “cliff, rock”, хадын көңгл “cave in a rock”, хадă чолун “stone-cliff”, хадын дүңгэ харта хар Кинясиг хамдень хадад оркв “Jangar hewed Kinyas and his black horse similar to a rock” (old-written Mongolian qada, Buryat хада).
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 һарьдаг and means ‘woodless mountain top’. The highest mountain in the Tunkinsky District of Buryatia, within the Tunkinsky mountain range, is Munkhe-Sardag (Buryat: Мүнхэ-һарьдаг), 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 — sariday — are represented by two elements — sari and day, which can be well interpreted as the Turkic words sarї “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 хазар “heavy-going place” (old-written Mongolian боฏут, Khalkha-Mongolian боом, Buryat боомо газар “cape, outstanding mountain”). V.I. Rassadin assumes that “[…] this Mongolian word was derived from the Mongolian verb боฏу ‘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 бульш “grave, repository, graveyard” (old-written Mongolian булашї, Khalkha-Mongolian булаа “grave-mound; grave, graveyard, burying ground, cemetery”, Buryat булаша “gravesite, grave-mound, grave, graveyard”). V.I. Rassadin writes, “The internal form of this word consists of the components bula and ši, where ši is nothing but a usual deverbative word-formative common Mongolian affix, while the bula component can be identified with the Mongolian verb bula” (RASSADIN, 2015, p. 83). A few examples: Khalkha-Mongolian булаах, Buryat булааха “embed, bury”, Kalmyk булах “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 жалха “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 цецеглэг “flower garden” (Khalkha-Mongolian цэцэглэг “flower garden, garden”, Buryat сэсэглиг “blooming”), old-written Mongolian čečeglig, made up of the root čečeg “flower” (Khalkha-Mongolian цэцэг, Buryat сэсэг) and the affix lig. Khalkha-Mongolian цэцэрлэг “garden, greenhouse, flower garden” and Buryat сэсэрлиг “flower garden, rarely “flower bed”.

The Kalmyk and Oirat-Mongolian word ёл “desert” (Khalkha-Mongolian ёл “desert, deserted, unpeopled”, Buryat сүл “deserted”, сүл газар, сүл гүби “desert”), old-written Mongolian ċöl with the same meaning.

The Kalmyk and Oirat-Mongolian word ой “obsolete wood, wildwood, thicket” (Khalkha-Mongolian ой “wood (usually on a plain)”, Buryat ой “wood”). Both in Kalmyk and the language of Mongolian Oirats, it is more commonly used in a combination: о-мөдөн “forest, bosk”. Examples: чонас ой буу ордго “if you are afraid of wolves, don’t get into the forest”; о дотр очан мет орөнө ыовна “flies through the forest like a spark”.

The Kalmyk and Oirat-Mongolian word тариалан “planting, seeding; field, ploughland” (Khalkha-Mongolian тарийлан “ploughland, field, planting”, Buryat маргалан “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 хур “torrential rain” (Khalkha-Mongolian бороо(н), Buryat бороо), old-written Mongolian боруγ=a. Examples: ахад орсанны хур, ирүүтөөр орсанны хур “torrential rain”.

The Kalmyk and Oirat-Mongolian word цасан “snow” (Khalkha-Mongolian өл “snow”, Buryat сањ вин “snow”), old-written Mongolian эсэн “snow”. Examples: өсэн санан санана, чуңас улан халхта “Her forehead is whiter than snow, her cheeks are brighter than blood”.

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The Kalmyk and Oirat-Mongolian word солаңхă “rainbow” (Khalkha-Mongolian солонго “rainbow”, Buryat холонго “rainbow”), old-written Mongolian solungγa “rainbow”.

Examples: солаңхă солаңхтăрҗана “rainbow appeared”.

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

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

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