

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

Svetlana Menkenovna TROFIMOVA¹

Valentina Lidzhiyevna 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 once one people separated in time and space.*

KEYWORDS: *Language contacts, general Mongolian layer, the Kalmyk language, the language of Oirats in Mongolia, the old-written Mongolian language, landscape lexis.*

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

¹ Kalmyk State University named after B.B. Gorodovikov, Elista, Russia. Link 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. Link 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. Link 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. Link Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6852-7835>. E-mail: Balzhinimayeva@yandex.ru

⁵ Mongolian State University, Ulan Bator, Mongolia. Link Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6884-7951>. E-mail: Byambadzhav@yandex.ru

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 here 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 was 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 most ancient 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 and 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 *делкэ*, “world, earth, universe”, *делкэ дээр* “in the whole world, all over the world”, *делкэ эргэд* “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 эклидэн маитг*, *хол эклидэн хэр* “the mountain is low at its beginning, and the river is shallow at its head” (old-written Mongolian. *ayula*, Khalkha-Mongolian *уул* “mountain, mountains, mountain range, Buryat *уула*).

The Kalmyk and Oirat-Mongolian words *хадь* “cliff, rock”, *хадын көңгөл* “cave in a rock”, *хадь чолун* “stone-cliff”, *хадын дүңгэ харта хар Кинэсиг хамднь хадад оркв* “Jangar hewed Kinyas and his black horse similar to a rock” (old-written Mongolian *qada*, Buryat *хада*).

As for the word *маг* “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 *sari* “yellow” and *day* “mountain” (Rassadin, 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 hazǎp* “heavy-going place” (old-written Mongolian *boγum*, Khalkha-Mongolian *боом*, Buryat *боомо газар* “cape, outstanding mountain”). V.I. Rassadin assumes that “...this Mongolian word was derived from the Mongolian verb *boγu* ‘block, obstruct, cut off, hamper’, which also has the meaning ‘tie up, tie around, wrap up’” (Rassadin, p. 85).

The Kalmyk and Oirat-Mongolian word *бульи* “grave, repository, graveyard” (old-written Mongolian *bulaši*, Khalkha-Mongolian *були* “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, p. 83). A few examples: Khalkha-Mongolian *булах*, Buryat *булаха* “embed, bury”, Kalmyk *булх* “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 *tobung* “small hill, mount, elevation” (Mongolian *товон* “mount”, Buryat *добуун* “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 *жалһа* “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 *jily-a* ← **jilya*. Ravines are a kind of a hollow, at the bottom of which there might or might not 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 *цэцгэлэг* “flower garden” (Khalkha-Mongolian *цэцгэлэг* “flower garden, garden”, Buryat *сэсэглиг* “blooming”), old-written Mongolian *čečeglig*, made up of the root *čečeg* “flower” (Khalkha-Mongolian *цэцэг*,

Buryat*эсэг*) and the affix *lig*. Khalkha-Mongolian *үзүэрлэг* “garden, greenhouse, flower garden” and Buryat *эсэрлиг* “flower garden, rarely “flower bed”.

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

The Kalmyk and Oirat-Mongolian word *ө* “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: *ө-модън* “forest, bosk”. Examples: *чонас ээхэ күн ө-мод ордго* “if you are afraid of wolves, don’t get into the forest”; *ө дотр очан мет өсрэд йовна* “flies through the forest like a spark”.

The Kalmyk and Oirat-Mongolian word *тэрэлһэн* “planting, seeding; field, ploughland” (Khalkha-Mongolian *тариалан* “ploughland, field, planting”, Buryat *таряалан* “ploughland”), old-written Mongolian *tarijalang* with the same meaning ← **tariyalang*, consisting of two components **tariyū* 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: *асхад орсан хур*, *шүүрүтәһәр орсан хур* “torrential rain”.

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

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

Examples: *солъһа солъһтәржәна* “rainbow appeared”.

The Kalmyk and Oirat-Mongolian word *салькән* “wind” (Khalkha-Mongolian *салхи(н)* “wind”, Buryat *һалхин* “wind”), old-written Mongolian *salki* “wind”. Examples: *салькән хурдән*, *салькнас санан хурдән* “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 *möndür* “hail”. Examples: *күчтә мөндөр орв* “there has been heavy hail”.

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

Acknowledgment

The research was carried out with financial support from the Russian Foundation for Basic Research and the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science of Mongolia within project no. 19-512-44006.

REFERENCES

- Bolshoi akademicheskii mongolsko-russkii slovar** [The Great Academic Mongolian-Russian Dictionary]. Volume 1. А–Г. Moscow, ACADEMIA: 2001a.
- Bolshoi akademicheskii mongolsko-russkii slovar** [The Great Academic Mongolian-Russian Dictionary]. Volume 2. Д–О. Moscow: ACADEMIA, 2001b.
- Bolshoi akademicheskii mongolsko-russkii slovar** [The Great Academic Mongolian-Russian Dictionary]. Volume 3. Θ–Φ. Moscow: ACADEMIA, 2001c.
- Bolshoi akademicheskii mongolsko-russkii slovar** [The Great Academic Mongolian-Russian Dictionary]. Volume 4. Х–Я. Moscow: ACADEMIA, 2002.
- Kalmytsko-russkii slovar** [Kalmyk-Russian Dictionary]. Moscow: Sovetskaya entsiklopediya, 1977.

RASSADIN, V.I. **Leksika nezhivoi prirody v sostave tyurko-mongolskoi obshchnosti** [The vocabulary of inanimate nature as a part of Turkic-Mongolian language commonness]. Uralo-altaiskie issledovaniya, v. 4, no. 19, pp. 82-93m 2015.

RASSADIN, V.I., TROFIMOVA, S.M. **Prakticheskaya grammatika sovremennogo kalmytskogo yazyka** [Practical grammar of the modern Kalmyk language]. Elista: ZAO "NPP 'Dzhangar'", 2018.

SHAGDAROV, L.D., CHEREMISOV K.M. **Buryaad-orod toli. Buryatsko-russkii slovar** [Buryat-Russian Dictionary]. Volume 1. A–H. Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2010a.

SHAGDAROV, L.D., CHEREMISOV, K.M. **Buryaad-orod toli. Buryatsko-russkii slovar** [Buryat-Russian Dictionary]. Volume 2. O–Я. Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya tipografiya, 2010b.

BUYANDALAI, ZH. **Torguud ayalguun. Tol bichig**. Khovd. Bulgan Sum, 1996.

VANDUI, E. **Dorvod aman ayalguuny zarim ontslogoos** [From the features of the four oral dialects]. Ulaanbaatar, 1962.

VANDUI, E. **Dorvod aman ayalguu** [Four oral dialects]. Ulaanbaatar, 1965.

LUVSANBALDAN, KH. **Torguud aman ayalguuny ontslog** [Fines and peculiarities of oral dialect]. Ulaanbaatar: Khel zokhiol sudlal, 1975.

SAMBUUDORZH, O. **Torguud aman ayalguuny temdeglel**. Ulaanbaatar, 1996.

TSOLOO, ZH. **Zakhchiny aman ayalguu**. Ulaanbaatar, 1965.

TSOLOO, ZH. **Bnmau dakh mongol khelnii nutgiin ayalguuny tol bichig** [Dictionary of Mongolian dialects in the People's Republic of Mongolia]. Volume 2. Oird ayalguu. Ulaanbaatar, 1988.

STRALENBERG, GH.J. **Das nord und östliche Theil von Europa und Asia**. Stockholm, 1730.