

Siegl Florian and Rießler Michael. Uneven Steps to Literacy. The History of the Dolgan, Forest Enets and Kola Sámi Literary Languages. In: Marten Heiko F., Rießler Michael, Saarikivi Janne, Toivanen Reetta (eds.). *Cultural and Linguistic Minorities in the Russian Federation and the European Union Comparative Studies on Equality and Diversity. Multilingual Education Series*, volume 13, Springer International Publishing Switzerland, 2015. – P. 189-230.

The Dolgan Path to Literacy

The first attempt to create literacy for Dolgan took place in the year 1960. A young Dolgan reporter, Nikolaj Popov, compiled short news in Dolgan for the local newspaper Sovetskij Tajmyr based on an idiolectal orthography (for historical background cf. Chap. 4 in Anderson 2000). However, this attempt did not have any impact and was abandoned rather quickly. The first steps that finally led to the creation of Dolgan literacy were taken by the Dolgan writer Ogdo (Evdokija) Aksenova. It is fair to say that Aksenova was a product of the Soviet indigenous capacity building endeavor, as the following biographic notes demonstrate. Aksenova was born in the tundra close to Volocanka and attended the local boarding school. Later she was granted a place at Irkutsk University, she decided against taking up studies as she was troubled by health problems which accompanied her throughout her life. Instead, she worked for many years as a political agitator in a 'Red Chum' among Dolgan, and later also as a teacher and as a librarian. Since the late 1960s, Aksenova has occasionally published poetry in her native language; this was first gathered in little Dolgan-Russian booklets in the 1970s.

The first of these with a larger print-run was called Baraksan and appeared in 1973. With her acceptance as a professional member of the USSR writers' union in 1976, Aksenova was able to attend several advanced training sessions in literature in Moscow between 1977 and 1979. During those training sessions, she became acquainted with other writers from different indigenous peoples of Siberia. It appears that in this period, Aksenova must have decided to compile a primer for Dolgan. The first time this was mentioned in her correspondence with Valerij Kravec was in 1978. Although Aksenova did not receive any higher education, she was aware that a variety of Dolgan sounds could not be represented by the traditional Cyrillic alphabet. Because of this, she started to investigate how similar problems had been solved for other Turkic languages, mainly Yakut, but Khakass is also mentioned. In a letter to Kravec, she points out that this step was necessary in order to ensure that future Dolgan materials could be printed without technical obstacles. In another letter to Kravec, Aksenova wrote about her first encounter with the local representative of the Communist Party, from whom she sought support for her ideas about turning Dolgan into a written language. She approached the local authorities for permission to translate a speech by Lenin. However, their reactions were negative. Her letter contains a quotation from a member of the Communist Party responsible for agitation and propaganda:

Yes, and then this Zykova shouted at me. What? You want to translate Lenin into your language, even if your language has only about 2,000 words? (3 November 1978) (Aksenova 2001, 98)

However, in November 1979, the local Tajmyrian Soviet approved the creation of a Dolgan orthography.

The Birth of the First Dolgan Primer and the School Dictionary

An extraordinarily rich documentation of the early process of Dolgan literacy creation compiled by Anna Barbolina sheds some light on this development, which took more than a decade before the official primer was published in 1990. In 1979, the Research Institute of Minority Education of RSFSR contacted the Department of Siberian Languages at the Siberian Branch of the Soviet Academy of Sciences in Novosibirsk because of Ogdo Aksenova's proposal to create a written norm for Dolgan based on her earlier publications. The choice of Novosibirsk was not entirely coincidental: Elizaveta Ubrjatova, a distinguished specialist of Yakut and the phonetician Vladimir Nadeljaev belonged to the first generation of researchers on Dolgan, and another three researchers from Tomsk working on Dolgan, Zinaida Dim'janenko, Natal'ja Bel'tjukova, Tamara Koševerova, were involved as consultants. In the meantime, Ogdo Aksenova, Anna Barbolina and Vladimir Parfir'ev continued working on the compilation of the first primer and tested it at a boarding school in Dudinka where Dolgan children from the Dolgan villages in the Dudinka area studied. This resulted in an experimental primer for first grade, which was published in a small print-run in Moscow in 1981. In an internal review of this trial edition this primer was severely criticized by Elizaveta Ubrjatova, as the authors had decided to stick to their own orthography instead of incorporating several modifications proposed by the assisting working group. Quite surprisingly, most of the criticism, including proposals, was even published in print in a local scientific compilation (Nadeljaev 1982).

In the following years, the manuscript for a new primer was compiled, this time by Ogdo Aksenova and Anna Barbolina alone. In March 1983, Elizaveta Ubrjatova and later in September the local Tajmyrian Soviet in Dudinka accepted the revised manuscript and a so-called preliminary stable primer could be to be published in Krasnojarsk in 1984. The decision to publish the interim primer in Krasnojarsk (and not, as expected, as a ready primer in Leningrad) was the outcome of centralized publication plans in the USSR. The printing plan for educational materials did not allow printing the Dolgan primer sooner. In the end, the first officially endorsed Dolgan primer by Ogdo Aksenova and Anna Barbolina was printed in Leningrad in 1990. However, the first official primer never made it to Dolgan schools. When the print-run was finally sent to the Tajmyr Peninsula, the truck transporting the primers from Norilsk airport to Dudinka was involved in an accident and sank into a river. The whole print-run was irreversibly damaged and the local administration had to order a reprint, which arrived safely in Dudinka in 1991.

Apart from Anna Barbolina's documentation of this process, Ogdo Aksenova's letters contain several interesting personal observations. First, in the period of compilation of the preliminary stable primer, the first quarrels within the Dolgan community seem to have occurred. Criticism was centered on Aksenova's lack of any higher education, which she also confessed as a problem to Kravec. We have, however, not found any relicts of this today. Further, in the same letter, the scientific support from the Tomsk researcher Zinaida Dem'janenko is explicitly mentioned. In the documentation of the process by Anna Barbolina, Dim'janenko plays a marginal role.

Although the birth of literacy and the compilation of the first primer are indeed largely products of Ogdo Aksenova's work, her name appears only once more on educational material. In 1992, Aksenova, assisted by the researchers Natal'ja Bel'tjukova and Tamara Koševerova from Tomsk, published a small Dolgan–Russian–Dolgan dictionary containing around 4,000 words

(Aksenova et al. 1992). This work also remained her last work directly aimed at the creation of a literary standard for Dolgan during her life.

Capacity Training

Ogdo Aksenova understood quite early that in order to create literacy for Dolgan, a critical number of assistants and compilers should be available to get the process going. One of her main concerns was that a native speaker should be trained in linguistics, and for this, Vladimir Parfir'ev was sent to Leningrad to be trained in Turcology and Dolgan specifically. This decision paid off, as Vladimir Parfir'ev, together with another specialist on Dolgan based in St. Petersburg, Nikolaj Artem'ev, compiled a primer for second grade. Anna Barbolina, the co-author of the first primer, also completed her candidate degree in educational sciences in St. Petersburg in 1996. Further, she compiled several more teaching materials for Dolgan, among these a picture dictionary and teaching materials for the kindergarten level.

Apart from Ogdo Aksenova, Anna Barbolina and Vladmir Pafir'ev, several more individuals have actively participated in the creation of further teaching and reading materials, among them Žanna Spiridonova and the late Irina Sotnikova. Of these, the most important were the late Nikolaj Popov, a Dolgan journalist, and his wife, a long time school teacher Margarita Popova; they compiled further teaching materials for Dolgan for higher classes (grade three to seven). Popov also further translated fragments of the Bible, a children's Bible and a Puškin fairytale into Dolgan. From the standpoint of literacy, Popov's novels for teenagers and young adults are perhaps the most important. This engagement is indeed noteworthy, as apart from the typical concept of indigenous literacy in Siberia consisting of primers, folklore collections and dictionaries, Nikolaj Popov made an active attempt to take a step beyond.