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A SONG OF MARRIAGE AND SETTING UP A HOUSE. A PROTO-DOLGAN SONG RECORDED BY K.M. RYCHKOV

The Dolgan language, a small Turkic language in far north Russia, has experienced a complicated process of language formation caused by close language contact, mixture, language shift, and so on. The number of speakers is about 5000 6000, according to the 2002 Russian census. The language is not so different from Yakut. However, the Dolgan language plays a role in supporting the identity of the Dolgan people.

A linguist, social activist, and ethnographer Konstantin Mikhajlovich Rychkov (1882–1923) recorded abundant linguistic and ethnographic materials about Samoyed, Tungusic, and Turkic peoples in Siberia at the beginning of the 20th century. His fieldwork records are now preserved at the Museum of Ethnography and the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts (both institutions of the Russian Academy of Sciences) in St. Petersburg.

In this paper, I report a song of marriage in proto-Dolgan found among the unpublished linguistic material compiled by Rychkov. Here, the text of the song is in three ways: 1) transcribed text by Rychkov with its Romanised transliteration; 2) edited text with identified words; 3) meaning of the text (my translation), though almost of all these three are so far tentative. The photos of the text by Rychkov are also attached. In this song, we can see some characteristics of the linguistic environment at the time.

The Dolgan language, a small Turkic language in far north Russia, might be regarded as the Tajmyr dialect of the Yakut language, but it has experienced a complicated process of language formation caused by close language contact, mixture, language shift, and so on. The number of speakers is about 5000–6000, according to the 2002 Russian census (Perepis' 2002). A monograph on this language, “Jazyk Noril'skikh Dolgan”, (Ubryatova 1985), provides a survey of phonetics, grammar, and so on. Although the number of speakers is very small, this language attracts linguistic interest because the ethnic community can be regarded as having formed at the same time as the language itself (Dolghikh 1963). We can say the Dolgan language is the language of the Dolgan people. As a matter of fact, the language is not so different from Yakut. However, the Dolgan language plays a role in supporting the identity of the Dolgan people.

At the time of the USSR and also the period after its dissolution, it was almost impossible for foreign researchers to directly collect precise data about small languages of Siberia such as Dolgan. Shortly after this period, Prof. Dr. Marek Stachowski published the two solid volumes *Dolganischer Wortschatz* (1993) and *Dolganischer Wortschatz – Supplementband* (1998). Stachowski defines Dolgan words and phrases with precise citations and provides relevant information from literature. Taking the opportunity of this festive volume, I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Marek Stachowski for his study and for being one of the most active successors of the tradition of linguistics in Poland or in northern Europe, not only on Turkic but also Asian languages in general. This article is also supported by Stachowski's works.

1. Linguistic materials compiled by Russian researcher Konstantin Mikhajlovich Rychkov

Konstantin Mikhajlovich Rychkov (1882–1923) was a linguist, social activist, and ethnographer. He spent about 13 years in Siberia as a prisoner or as a field worker. While in Siberia at the beginning of the 20th century, for about 10 years he compiled data following instructions from a member of the Imperial Academy in St. Petersburg with whom he corresponded, Vladislav Ljudvigovich Kotvich (Władysław Kotwicz) (1872–1944).

K.M. Rychkov left abundant linguistic and ethnographic materials about Samoyed, Tungusic, and Turkic peoples (Rychkov 1915). His fieldwork records are now preserved at the Museum of Ethnography and the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts (both institutions of the Russian Academy of Sciences) in St. Petersburg. At the Archive of Orientalists in the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts (IOM), we find unpublished linguistic material on languages in the northern part of the Turukhansk Region (now the northern part of the Krasnojarsk Region), mainly on the Evenki language. Besides writings on the Evenki language, we find information about a Turkic language, namely the (proto-)Dolgan language, very similar to the Yakut language. One item is a Dolgan–Russian dictionary consisting of 1534 paper cards (see Fujishiro 2011, 2014a, 2014b). The dictionary well reflects the last stage of Dolgan language formation.

Among the letters addressed to his instructor Dr. V.L. Kotvich, Rychkov wrote that he collected folklore material among the Dolgans in the Turukhanskij region. However, so far we cannot find those Dolgan texts at IOM.

2. A Turkic song among Tungusic ones

In this paper, I report a song (words or phrases of a song) in a Turkic language recorded by Rychkov. This song is found among the unpublished materials in a Tungusic language, namely the Evenki language. This part of the material (the inventory of the archive of IOM, F49–1-5–6~8) in a voluminous folder (IOM, F49-1-5)3 is titled “Songs” in Evenki as “Ikol”, and in Russian, “Пѣсни”. Only a few songs are recorded, mostly in Evenki, and some lines of them have a parallel Russian translation by Rychkov (IOM, F49–1-5–6~10). The song we cite here is in Yakut or proto-Dolgan, and its lines have no Russian translation. The parallel side of every line is left blank. This song is followed by a short commentary in Evenki with its Russian translation. The text was recorded using the Cyrillic alphabet.

In this song, we can see some characteristics of the linguistic environment at the time. In fact, it is hard to capture the meaning of the text recorded by Rychkov. However, it is worth reading and analysing what language the song was sung in, since at that time the language communities in northern Siberia, Turkic, Tungusic, Russian and possibly other languages, are closely in contact with each other.

The content of the song is something connected with marriage or making up ties or bonds, or, it might be said metaphorically, the song is about mating. The song is followed by a commentary paragraph of some sentences in the Evenki language with Rychkov’s translation: “If he marries this girl and they sleep close together, the husband might be good. If they sleep close together again, then they will sleep well. If once again, it will be much better.”

In consulting this part of the folder, we cannot find any comment by Rychkov on what kind of situation or time this song was sung in. The language of the song is obviously Turkic and it is based on the Yakut language, since Dolgan was formed mainly on the basis of Yakut, and Evenki, Nganasan, and Russian are also involved. We can speculate that this song might be sung by a member of a multilingual community at that time in the northern Turukhansk area.

The words and phrases of the song are mostly in Turkic, but some words or phrases are from Russian, such as сувакэ (< суваха), поклон, прости, and in transcription we can find characteristics of в (w), which Rychkov in principle used only for limited words in his transcription of Dolgan-Russian Card Dictionary, which letter stands for bilabialized w or bilabial fricative β. In addition, it is often seen in the Card Dictionary that rounded vowels such as ü or ö lose their roundness, as is also seen in this song text. This might reflect the vowel system of Evenki.