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Contact-induced change in Dolgan : an investigation into the role of linguistic data for the reconstruction of a people's (pre)history

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2.1 GENERAL INFORMATION

The Dolgan people are the northernmost Turkic-speaking population in the world. Their territory is situated entirely above the Arctic Circle, and comprises the Taimyr Peninsula and certain parts of the neighbouring Anabar district in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) (Savvinov 2005: 7, Ventsel 2005: 6, see Map 1 in Section 1.1). The etymology of their ethnonym has multiple potential interpretations. It is certain that ‘Dolgan’ has Tungusic origins, as it occurs repeatedly as the name of a Tungusic clan in different parts of Siberia, varying from Dolgan to Dulgan or Dulgaan. The most plausible interpretation is that it comes from the root *dul-* ‘middle’ in Evenki and Even, denoting inhabitants of the middle of the river, as opposed to those upriver and downriver.

The self-identification of the Dolgans on the Taimyr does not always match this official label. In all linguistic and ethnographic sources it is reported that they self-identify as *tia kihite*, or *tia*, the Dolgan equivalent of ‘tundra person’ or simply ‘tundra’. In addition, they may identify as *tege*, the Evenki word for ‘human’ or as ‘Sakha’¹ (Dolgikh 1963: 150). This inconsistency in (self)-denotation may have to do

¹ During my trips in 2008, 2009 and 2010, I did not encounter people who self-identified as either *tia kihite* or *tege*. This may have to do with my being a foreigner, for whom people use their official label, or it might be that this characterisation is becoming old-fashioned. Most people self-identified as Dolgan

with the relatively recent formation of the Dolgans as a separate ethnolinguistic group, and with the concurrent changes in naming during this process. It may also be related to an existing view that Dolgan as an ethnolinguistic unit was created by outsiders (ethnographers, politicians) and does not reflect an internally coherent ethnic group (Anderson 2000; 74, 78, see also Section 2.4.2).

The Dolgans are the most numerous group of indigenous people on the Taimyr Peninsula: according to the most recent counts, 5,517 Dolgans were living in the Taimyr Autonomous District, which was renamed the Taimyr Municipal District in 2007. This corresponds to 54% of the entire indigenous population of the region, while the Nenets, Nganasan, Evenks and Enets together make up the remaining 46%². The Sakha, who constitute the sixth ethnic group of the wider region, are primarily associated with the neighbouring Anabar district to the east of the Taimyr.

The Dolgans have not always been in the numerically dominant position they occupy today. In fact, they are often described as the ‘youngest’ ethnic group on the Taimyr Peninsula, whereby ‘youngest’ refers to their formation as a separate ethnolinguistic group, and not to the first time the clan name appears in ethnographic accounts. It is commonly recognised that the people who identify as Dolgan today are a mix of Tungusic (Evenk), Turkic (Sakha) and Slavic peoples (Russian Tundra Peasants) (e.g. Dolgikh 1963: 93, Ubryatova 1985: 5, Forsyth 1992: 56, Slezkine 1994: 102, Anderson 2000: 9, 85). However, there is no agreement as to the moment these different ethnic groups began to consolidate into a new community, how exactly this happened, and which factors motivated this development. Estimates vary from the 17th century (Ubryatova 1985: 8, Stachowski 1996: 129) to as recently as the 20th century (Dolgikh 1963: 137). This wide time span can be explained by the fact that the term ‘Dolgan’ has been given different interpretations by ethnographers, historians and politicians over time, and by the concurrent administrative changes on the Taimyr Peninsula, which promoted or demoted the recognition of the Dolgans as an ethnolinguistic group.

and some older people as Sakha, which reflects the fact that this was their official name between 1935 and 1961 (see Section 2.4.2 for more details). However, they recognised *tia kihite* as a way to refer to themselves as an ethnolinguistic group.

² The numbers for all indigenous ethnic groups (confirmed in 2008) in the Taimyr Municipal District are as follows: Dolgan - 5517, Nenets - 3468, Nganasan - 749, Evenks - 270, Enets - 168, other - 27 (cited from http://www.taimyr24.ru/about/index.php?SECTION_ID=122&ELEMENT_ID=646 accessed on January 18th 2012). Altogether, the indigenous population comprises 27% of the entire population on the Taimyr.

The language of the Dolgan people is also called Dolgan. Together with Sakha, it belongs to the northeastern branch of the Turkic language family, and it can be divided into two dialects: the *üðhegi* or upriver dialect, and *allaragi* or downriver dialect. The upriver dialect is spoken in the villages Khantayskoe Ozero, Ust' Avam, Volochanka, and Katyryk, the downriver dialect in Novaya, Kresty, Khatanga, Zhdanikha, Novorybnoe, Syndassko and Sopochnoe (see Map 2 in Section 1.3.1). The people in Kheta, where I conducted part of my fieldwork, characterised their Dolgan variety as 'a mixture' of both dialects. The dialects are very similar and differ predominantly in terms of certain lexical items and certain phonetic features.

Linguistically, Dolgan is very closely related to Sakha, the main language spoken in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). The languages are largely mutually intelligible with misunderstandings caused predominantly by differences in lexicon, pronunciation and rate of speech. It is easier for Sakha speakers to understand Dolgan than the other way round. This is probably due to the wider geographical distribution of Sakha as well as to its higher prestige and greater prominence in media (radio, newspaper). The estimated number of Dolgan speakers is 1,054 or 13.4% of the Dolgan population (Russian census 2010). Bilingualism is omnipresent and the Russian language is gaining ground quickly. As an illustration, the Russian census of 2002 still reported that 67% of the Dolgan population speak Dolgan. Although the significance of these numbers should be evaluated with some scepticism, it is certain that the number of speakers is declining rapidly.

While everybody has native or near-native command of Russian, four very broad categories can be observed within the Dolgan population with respect to their linguistic dominance. People over 65 are bilingual, but mostly dominant in Dolgan. Those between 45 and 65 show true bilingualism and have equally good command of both languages. For people younger than 45, Russian is clearly the dominant language, and under 25 it is hard to find fluent Dolgan speakers at all. It goes without saying that there is a large amount of individual variation within these categories. For example, within the 45-65 category, Dolgan proficiency generally declines as people get younger. However, these categories illustrate the general process of an on-going language shift to Russian. This picture represents the language situation in all villages except Syndassko and Sopochnoe, where everyone over five years old is bilingual, but where Dolgan still is the dominant language for everyday use, and children still learn it as their mother tongue.

In order to understand the diverse opinions about the Dolgan people and their language, it is necessary to be aware of the historical, ethnographic and genetic accounts that each give a different perspective on their fascinating history. As will become clear in the remainder of this chapter, it seems that such accounts have not only described but also actively shaped the Dolgans as an ethnic group. Without pretending to be exhaustive, this chapter is intended to provide the essential background information from these three perspectives. After a brief description of their natural environment, the emergence of the Dolgan people will be embedded in historical (Section 2.3), ethnographic (Section 2.4), linguistic (Section 2.5) and genetic (Section 2.6) contexts.

2.2 GEOGRAPHICAL ENVIRONMENT

2.2.1 ECOLOGY, FLORA AND FAUNA

The primary area of residence of the Dolgan people today is the Taimyr (Dolgan-Nenets) Municipal District³. The label of this administrative unit reflects its geographical location (Taimyr), as well as the names of the two largest indigenous ethnic groups that currently inhabit this territory (the Dolgans and the Nenets). It is divided into four administrative districts (Dudinka, Khatanga, Dikson and Karaul) and the administrative centre is in the city of Dudinka. The entire district, which consists of the Taimyr Peninsula and adjacent areas to the south and east, is located north of the Arctic Circle and includes the northernmost tip of the Eurasian mainland, Cape Chelyuskin. It covers 879,900 square kilometres, which roughly corresponds to two and a half times the size of Germany (357,021 square kilometres), with a population density of 0.045 persons per square kilometre (cf. 229 for Germany)⁴. This vast area is characterised by two main ecological zones: forest tundra in the south, and tundra, or Arctic desert, in the north. The boundary between these ecological zones, which coincides with the tree line, runs right across the peninsula and plays an important role in the distribution and movement of humans and animals in the region.

The forest tundra, which is a transitional zone between the dense forest of the taiga further south and the moon-like landscape of the treeless tundra in the

³ Таймырский (долгано-ненецкий) муниципальный район.

⁴ Numbers are taken from the website of the Taimyr: www.taimyr24.ru, accessed on January 18th, 2012.

north, is characterised by the presence of larch trees, willow weed and dwarf birches, interspersed by patches of barren tundra. North of the tree line, the tundra stretches all the way north to the Arctic Ocean. Here the landscape looks entirely devoid of trees and the severe climate only allows for the growth of mosses, lichens and some polar willows (Ziker 1998: 63, Anderson 2000: 11). These willows are hard to recognise as trees, as they have adapted to the severe climate by growing almost horizontally, and they serve as a means of orientation for people travelling in the endless snowy tundra in winter (personal observation).

Water is another prominent feature of the area, in winter in the shape of snow and ice, in summer in the shape of majestic rivers, in particular the Yenisey and Kheta (turning into Khatanga), which cross-cut the peninsula from south to north and from west to east respectively. In addition, summer reveals a myriad of lakes, puddles and swamps, which rapidly emerge as the rays of the sun gain in strength and cause the solid, frozen landscape to melt. The combination of the melting snow on the surface and the permafrost below prevents the water from being absorbed into the soil and thus provides ideal conditions for vast quantities of migratory (water)birds (geese, ducks, loons, storks, falcons (Ziker 1998: 67), and an even more overwhelming quantity of thirsty mosquitoes.

In addition, this region is home to rock ptarmigans, lemmings, wolves and bears (brown bears in the south, polar bears in the north), but most important to the indigenous people are the herds of wild reindeer, which are reported to be among the largest in the world (Ziker 1998: 67). Within living memory, reindeer have always played a crucial role in the maintenance of human life in the area, as they provide a reliable source of food, clothing, transport and even building material in a natural environment that otherwise provides rather unfavourable living conditions. The reindeer were also an important reason for the widespread nomadism in the area. In fact, none of the indigenous peoples was originally sedentary. The unfeasibility of agriculture in this climate has led to a longstanding symbiosis of man and reindeer, where humans followed the migrating reindeer according to the rhythm of the seasons: north in summer and south in winter. However, this situation has been changing over the last 80 years or so, with increasing industry in the 1950's and the forced settlement in villages in the 1970's having dramatic consequences for animals and people (see Sections 2.3.3 and 2.3.4).

2.2.2 SETTLEMENTS AND CITIES

While the Dolgans remain mostly dependent on reindeer for food and to some extent for fur and transport, after the forced settlement of the 1970's most of them live permanently in villages. Even the families who spend most of their time in the tundra with the reindeer herd are officially registered in a village and have a house. Today the Dolgans live in ten villages in the Taimyr Municipal District, as well as in the towns of Dudinka and Khatanga. They are positioned in a line across the Peninsula from west to northeast⁵, linking the two larger towns of Dudinka and Khatanga and stretching beyond them. This distribution is by no means a coincidence. The line of villages roughly coincides with the tree line as well as with the Kheta and Khatanga rivers, which have provided a corridor for the transportation of people and goods for centuries, and which became known as the Khatanga Trading Way (see Sections 2.3.2.3 and 2.4.2 for details).

In the villages, which vary in size from roughly 400 to about 600 inhabitants, the Dolgan people constitute the absolute majority of the population. Only in Khantayskoye Ozero the population is mixed with Evenks, and in Ust' Avam, Volochanka and Novaya, Dolgans share the village with Nganasan people. It is worth noting that in Novaya the Nganasan people have adopted the Dolgan language, whereas in the two other villages the languages have been kept separate. The number of Russians can normally be counted on one hand, and typically they occupy positions in administration or are merchants. In the bigger towns of Dudinka and Khatanga the ethnic composition of the population is more heterogeneous, including Russians as well as people with other ethnic backgrounds (e.g. Khakasians, Ukrainians, Azerbaijanis). Nonetheless, the proportion of Dolgans is significant in the towns as well, particularly in Khatanga. Despite the problematic infrastructure there is quite a lively movement between villages and towns. Many young people come to Khatanga and Dudinka to study and many of them stay there after finishing their education. This in turn attracts more people from the villages who come over to visit their relatives in town or to do shopping and get supplies.

⁵ From west to east, these villages are Khantayskoye Ozero, Ust' Avam, Volochanka, Katyryk, Kheta, Novaya, Kresty, Zhdanikha, Novorybnoye, Syndassko and Sopochnoye (previously Popigay).

2.3 HISTORY

2.3.1 PREHISTORY OF THE TAIMYR (UP TO 1638)

Our recorded knowledge of the history of the indigenous people of Arctic Siberia begins only in the 17th century CE, when the Russians expanded their empire to include the vast unexplored lands behind the Ural Mountains. In order to map the area, they began to note down information on the inhabitants and their distribution across the territory. The main goal was to facilitate the collection of *yasak*, or tribute, which was extracted from the indigenous population in the form of furs. Obviously the prehistory of human occupation of the Taimyr extends much further back in time. However, since we have no means to physically travel back in time, the only available source of information about this period are archaeological findings, which at best can provide a patchy picture of the distant past.

The earliest evidence of human presence on the Taimyr Peninsula goes back to at least 7,000 years before CE. This estimate was made on the basis of bronze objects and crucibles for their production, which were discovered near the Volochanka River in 1967, and were later associated with east Siberian Mesolithic sites (Khlobystin 1972, Troitskiy 1987: 20, Khlobystin and Gracheva 1993, cited in Ziker 1998: 69, Denisov 2008: 8). It is known that in this period of time the climate at these latitudes was warmer than it is today, but no information has been preserved about the people who produced the objects. In contrast to these earliest discoveries, later ceramic objects dated 4,000 to 2,500 before CE show influences from east as well as west Siberian traditions, suggesting contact between people with different cultural traditions (Khlobystin and Gracheva 1993, cited in Ziker 1998: 69, Denisov 2008: 9). The assumption is that the earliest inhabitants of the Taimyr Peninsula were hunter-gatherers, related to the ancestors of today's Yukaghir, Chukchi and Inuit (Troitskiy 1987: 20 in Ziker 1998: 70).

In the 2nd to 4th century CE Samoyedic populations migrated north and eastwards and entered Arctic Siberia, including the Taimyr. The main incentive appears to have been the progression of the warfaring Hun tribes who conquered the Siberian south and who compelled the original population to escape to the north. It is presumed that these Samoyedic and later also Tungusic people eventually merged with the people already present on the Taimyr Peninsula. The migration of Samoyedic people into the Taimyr region continued in the period between the 10th and 15th centuries. They moved from west to east, where they

encountered the Tungusic groups, and spread both their language and culture across the Peninsula (Ziker 1998: 71).

In the 17th century the first Russians set foot on the current territory of the Dolgan people and this is when recorded history begins. However, at that time the presumed ancestors of the Dolgan were still living in the area between the Lena and Vilyuy Rivers in what is the present day Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). Therefore, in order to understand the history of the Dolgan people, two regions are of main importance: the area of the Lena and Vilyuy rivers where the ancestors of the Dolgan came from, and the Taimyr Peninsula, where they live today. Since the recorded history of the Dolgan is so closely intertwined with the presence of the Russians, first a brief sketch will be given of the penetration of the Russians into Siberia to illustrate the general climate in which the first encounters between Russians and indigenous people took place. After that the focus will move to the two geographical areas mentioned above.

2.3.2 RUSSIAN EMPIRE (1638 - 1917)

2.3.2.1 ACCESS TO WEST SIBERIA

The main motivation for the eastward expansion of the Russian empire into Siberia was the acquisition of fur. Besides a general curiosity about the unknown, which is deep-rooted in the human mind and drives most explorations, this “treasure of the land of darkness” (Slezkine 1994: 12) was the driving force for many Russians to risk their lives and conquer the vast territory behind the Ural Mountains. However, while its population may have been sparse, Siberia was anything but an empty land. At the time of the Russian conquest, Siberia was home to many different indigenous groups, speaking different languages, who had not exactly been waiting for the Russians to enter their hunting grounds and consequently did not receive them with joy. As much as these mysterious inhabitants were a danger to the Russians, they were also indispensable. After all, the indigenous people knew much better where to find and how to trap the sought-after sables, squirrels and foxes, and thus how to secure the fur for the future coats of people in Europe and Central Asia.

In theory, the assistance of these people was to be obtained voluntarily or at least in a non-violent manner, but reports of the actual procedures show that this resolution was easily abandoned if the approach did not have the desired effect for

the Russians. If the colonisers succeeded in subduing the indigenous Siberians, these would be registered as *yasak* (or tribute) people, which meant that they were obliged to supply a certain amount of fur to the tsar each year 'for ever and ever', in return for the tsars' 'protection' (Slezkine 1994: 15).

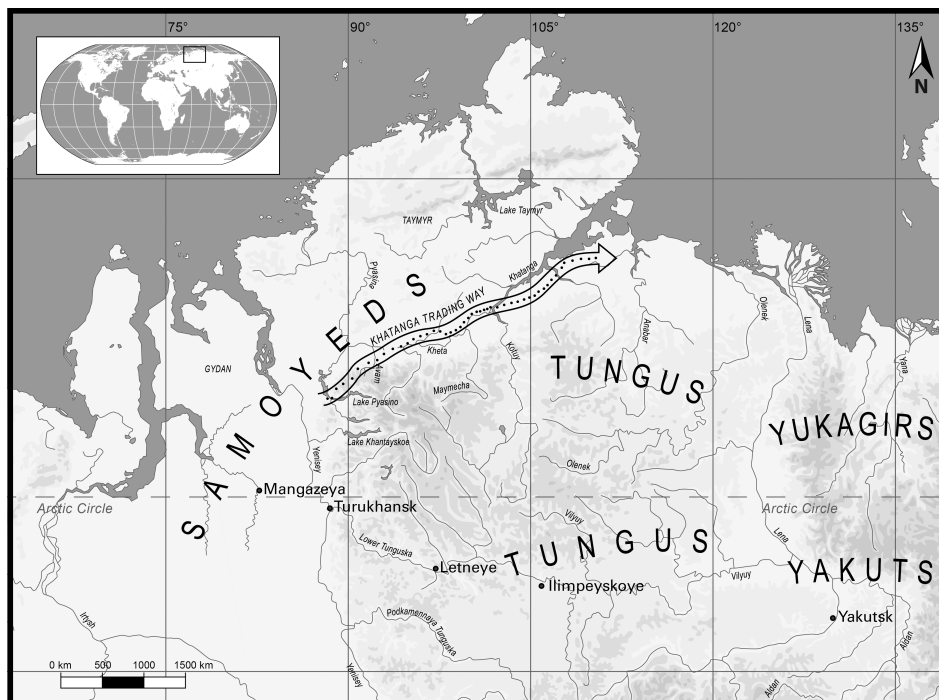
The fur trade is of principal importance because it had a dramatic impact on the lives of all indigenous Siberian peoples, as well as on the lives of the Russians themselves. The intensification of hunting practices, newly introduced diseases, as well as attempts to escape the tsar's 'exalted hand', which now extended deep into the Siberian taiga to tap into its rich resources (Gurvich 1966: 49 cited in Slezkine 1994: 21), led to new migrations, to new contacts, and for many populations to dramatic changes in their numbers and their manner of subsistence.

A key date in this development is the year 1552, when the khan of the Kazan Tatars was driven away, and the capital Kazan was conquered. From then on, the area between the Volga and the Ural Mountains belonged to Russia. This opened up the markets of Central Asia and the Middle East for the outflow of furs, which consequently led to an increase in demand (Forsyth 1992: 40, Slezkine 1994: 12). The real breakthrough in the Russian conquest of Siberia is typically considered the period of 1581-1582 when a Cossack army, headed by the Novgorodian Cossack Yermak Timofeevich, crossed the Ural Mountains and defeated Kuchum, the khan of Sibir, who had so far ruled the area (Slezkine 1994: 12-13, Ziker 1998: 71, Forsyth 1992: 30). This freed the way for hundreds, and later thousands, of trappers, mercenaries, soldiers and Cossacks to explore the immense stretch of land east of the Ural Mountains and all the way to the Pacific Ocean.

2.3.2.2 THE VILYUY AND LENA BASIN

In terms of the Russians securing access to the two areas that are significant in the history of the Dolgans, one event is of crucial importance. This is the founding of the fortress of Mangazeya in 1601 (see Map 3), which served as a springboard for the expansion of Russian power further east towards the Yenisey and Lena Rivers, as well as for the exploration of the Arctic regions of Siberia including the Taimyr Peninsula and the rivers Kotuy, Anabar and Olenek (Forsyth 1992: 57). Named after the local Samoyed tribe Mongkansi (Forsyth 1992: 36) this fortress thrived and quickly developed into a town that eventually became the capital of Central Siberia.

On their eastward journey from Mangazeya, the Russians soon reached the Yenisey River where they founded the fortresses of Turukhansk (1604) and Khantaysk (1620) (Forsyth 1992: 36). Travelling further up the Lower Tunguska and over land, they reached the great Lena River in the 1620's. Before the arrival of the Russians, this area was dominated by Tungusic people, whose territory extended eastward all the way to the Pacific Ocean and southeast into Mongolia and Manchuria. They shared this vast area with only two other ethnic groups, the Buryats at Lake Baikal, and the Sakha (or Yakut) people who at the time populated the confluence of the Lena and Vilyuy Rivers (Forsyth 1992: 48). Thus in this area Tungusic-speaking Evenk clans resided in the vicinity of the Turkic-speaking Sakha, and, as will be shown below, this coexistence and the consequent encounters are of great significance for the formation of the ethnolinguistic identity of the Dolgan people.



Map 3: Distribution of indigenous people and Khatanga Trading Way on the Taimyr Peninsula and neighbouring regions in the early 18th century

Turbulent times followed the arrival of the Russians. On the one hand, all the indigenous people had to protect themselves from the Russians, their indomitable

hunger for fur, and their diseases. On the other hand, internal rivalries between Sakha clans, as well as between the Sakha and Tungus clans made it impossible for them to join forces effectively against the invaders. Despite multiple efforts to defeat the Russians, which continued over fifty years (in particular by the Sakha (Forsyth 1992: 60) resistance did not last. By 1630 the Russians had subdued the Sakha on the Lena River to pay *yasak* to Mangazeya, and in the years to follow they extended their web of forts to the Olenek river where they established themselves among the Tungusic Edyan clan and to other Tungusic and Sakha clans along the Vilyuy and Aldan Rivers (1634-1638) (Forsyth 1992: 60).

An additional source of discontent in the indigenous communities were the internal rivalries among Russians themselves, and the consequences these had for their *yasak*-extracting practices. As the occupation of Siberia advanced, boundaries of districts changed, which often led to conflicts about who was entitled to claim *yasak* from the indigenous population in each area. Not unexpectedly, such problems were often 'solved' by both parties stubbornly insisting on the same right, with the implication that the Tungusic and Sakha clans had to pay their tribute twice. It can be safely assumed that such doubled *yasak* extraction corresponded to at least doubled discontent among the people who had to deliver it.

These conflicts, the oppression by the Russians, a *yasak*-load too much to cope with, in combination with the consequent dramatic drop in fur-bearing animals in the area was the incentive for a number of Tungusic and Sakha clans to leave their homeland and move to more northern and presumably safer lands. They moved to the basins of the Anabar, Olenek and Kotuy rivers, where they encountered other Tungusic clans and Samoyedic people. Here the Sakha clans, who had traditionally led a pastoralist lifestyle, had to adapt to their new Tungusic environment, and exchanged pastoralism for fishing and wild reindeer hunting as their main mode of subsistence (Forsyth 1992: 63).

Thus, from the mid 17th century onwards the area called northern Yakutia and southern Taimyr today, came to be populated with a variety of ethnic groups who were driven away from their original hunting and herding grounds. While the migrations of the indigenous groups can be partly attributed to the arrival of the Russians, this was probably not the only driving force. Being nomadic or semi-nomadic, moving to new territories was nothing unusual for many native Siberians. In addition, certain groups were simply in the process of expanding, most notably the Sakha. Starting from the relatively small area between the Lena,

Aldan and Amga rivers around the 13th century, to which they had migrated from further south, they now occupy the immense territory of Yakutia and are the dominant ethnic group in northeastern Siberia (Wurm 1996: 969, 971, Pakendorf 2006: 335). As a reaction to the influx of people from the south, the Samoyedic Tavgi (or Nganasan) population that had so far occupied the southern Taimyr retreated further north.

In these years the name 'Dolgan' appears in the historical records for the first time. In a document dated August 6th 1638 a certain Petr Golovin and Efim Filatov are instructed to "found a stockade town and to turn the Siberian aliens into Russian citizens"⁶, including the Dolgans. In this document they are mentioned in a list of Tungusic clans, and are described as people "whom nobody governs" (Russkaya istoricheskaya biblioteka, 1875: 968, cited in Ubryatova 1985: 8). Archival documents reveal that by 1638 these Dolgan people were living on the Lena River between the lower Vilyuy and the Aldan (Ubryatova 1985: 8, Dolgikh 1963: 107) and that they numbered between 90 and 120 people (Dolgikh 1963: 107). By 1644 they had already moved to the upper Vilyuy to escape the double *yasak* they were forced to pay to Mangazeya as well as to the town of Yeniseysk, but unfortunately this turned out to be no solution to the problem. According to Ubryatova, the struggle with the Russian Cossacks continued for a few more decades, and as a result the Dolgan clan dispersed over a large area: some wandered off to the east where they mixed with Tungusic Even groups, others isolated themselves in the upper reaches of the Vilyuy River and gradually moved northwest to the Taimyr Peninsula. The exact years of these migrations will probably remain a mystery for most of the populations. However, for the Dolgans who moved to the Olenek River, the time of their migration can be reconstructed to the period between 1655 and 1678 on the basis of *yasak* records (Dolgikh 1963: 108).

2.3.2.3 THE TAIMYR PENINSULA

As mentioned above, the Taimyr Peninsula has been inhabited by humans for at least 9,000 years, but it is uncertain when the first Russians set foot on its territory. This is not without reason. From the moment the disclosure of new fur-

⁶ "... для строения острога и приведения в русское подданство сибирских инородцев" (Russkaya istoricheskaya biblioteka 1875: 968, cited in Ubryatova 1985: 8).

trapping lands was made public, not only the indigenous people but also the Russian explorers themselves were obliged to pay tax on this land to the tsar, which explains why such discoveries were often kept secret for some time, and so do not appear with correct dates in historical documents (Ziker 1998: 72). One point of orientation is the year 1601, the year Mangazeya was built. Since this fortress became the main base for the exploration of the Siberian Arctic, the first appearance of Russians on the Taimyr cannot have been too far removed from this date.

One thing we can be certain about is that the first Russians arrived in an ethnographic landscape that was rather different from the situation on the Taimyr today. As was mentioned in Section 2.3.2.2, in the first half of the 17th century the ancestors of the Dolgan were still living to the southeast of the Taimyr, and when the first explorers travelled up the Kotuy River, they encountered some Tungusic groups, but first and foremost Samoyedic (Nganasan) populations, who occupied the large territory of the west Siberian Arctic ((Troitskiy 1987: 30 in Ziker 1998: 75, Forsyth 1992: 36, Dolgikh 1963:107). In a similar fashion to the Tungusic and Sakha groups further south, these people were not pleased with the prominent presence of Russians and they repeatedly attacked Russian fortresses from at least 1604 till 1672. By that time, the situation of the Russians in Mangazeya had become so unbearable that they abandoned the town and transferred their administrative personnel to Turukhansk on the Yenisey (Forsyth 1992: 46).

The main reason for the Russian Cossacks, tax collectors and hunters to persist in the inhospitable environment of the Taimyr was, as in other areas of Siberia, to procure fur. However, for this plan to work, an entire network of supporting personnel had to be mobilised to provide the necessary conditions for survival. Consequently there were also priests, craftsmen, merchants, and peasants among the newcomers to the Taimyr, who were concentrated primarily along the Kheta and Khatanga rivers (Forsyth 1992: 42). They set up small stations along these major rivers at a distance of 10 kilometres apart all the way across the peninsula from Dudinskoe on the Yenisey in the west, to Khatanga in the east (Stern 2005: 292). This comparatively lively corridor of transport, exchange and trade attracted people from different ethnic origins and became established as the Khatanga Trading Way (or Khatanga trakt) during the late 17th and early 18th centuries (see among others Anderson 2000: 86-86, Stern 2005: 292, Stern 2009: 388).

In more southern regions of Siberia, the 'peasants' mentioned above were literal peasants. They constituted an ever-growing group of Russians who had come to Siberia primarily to develop agriculture. As their numbers increased, their use of the land encroached more and more on the hunting grounds of the indigenous population, and these conflicting interests led to confrontations between the two groups (Forsyth 1992: 64). In Arctic Siberia such dangers were rather limited since the climate does not allow for much agriculture to be practiced, but the equally disturbing Russian fur-trappers were called 'government peasants' nonetheless, which is how the term 'Tundra Peasants'⁷ or 'old settlers' has become common usage (Troitskiy 1987: 54 in Ziker 1998: 78 Slezkine 1994: 97).

Until the 19th century, the number of Russian inhabitants of the Taimyr was very low. Fur hunters, tax collectors and merchants arrived regularly, but only a small number stayed and settled there permanently. This changed when in 1811 the governor of Tomsk initiated a settlement program in order to develop and improve the transport and communication system across the Taimyr Peninsula. Russian peasants were sent to the Arctic to cultivate the tundra, which obviously turned into a complete disaster. Having seen many of their fellows die, the only way for the remaining peasants to survive was to adopt the lifestyle of the native population. They adopted the cultural practices, beliefs and languages of the surrounding Sakha and Evenk tribes and intermarriage was common. Although some of them still identified as Russian, by the late 19th century most of them had become indistinguishable from the native population.

According to the Russian ethnographer Dolgikh, intermarriage was frequent not only between the Russians and the indigenous people, but also between members of different indigenous groups who inhabited the area around the Khatanga Trading Way (Dolgikh 1963: 125). This becomes apparent from Table 2.1, which presents an overview of all the registered marriages that took place on the Taimyr between 1727 and 1883. The table is taken from Dolgikh's famous work 'The origin of the Dolgans', and specifies the ethnic origins of the members of each couple. Dolgikh adduces the large number of interethnic marriages in the region, among others, as an important development for the formation of the Dolgan people as a separate ethnolinguistic group since it literally blurred ethnic boundaries. The names of the ethnic groups in the table are taken directly from Dolgikh's work. The Dolgan, Dongot, Edyan, Karanto, and Evenks are considered Tungusic clans;

⁷ Translated from Russian: затундренские крестьяне.

the Tundra Yakuts (referred to as T. Yakut in the table) and the Yessey Yakuts (indicated as Y. Yakut) are what I refer to as Sakha; the Tundra Peasants are of Russian origin and Samoyedic groups include the Nenets and Enets. Surprisingly, the Nganasan are not mentioned at all.

Table 2.1 Registered marriages on the Taimyr Peninsula between 1727 and 1883 (from Dolgikh 1963: 125)

Men	Women									
	Dolg.	Dong.	Edyan	Kar.	T.Yak.	T.Peas	Y.Yak	Evk.	Sam.	Total
Dolgan	25	1	-	1	27	18	4	8	1	85
Dongot	7	-	12	2	-	2	-	6	1	30
Edyan	-	10	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	12
Karanto	7	1	-	-	3	2	1	4	1	19
T.Yakut	38	-	-	-	100	38	3	1	3	183
T.Peas,	13	3	3	2	26	28	-	9	3	87
Y. Yakut	1	1	-	-	-	-	13	1	-	16
Evenki	3	5	3	4	3	2	2	15	1	36
Sam.	3	1	-	-	1	8	1	-	-	14
Total	97	22	18	9	160	96	24	46	10	482

This overview shows that out of 482 marriages only 181 (37.5%) were endogamous, i.e. between people of the same clan or ethnic group; the remaining 62.5% took place between people of different ethnic origins. With respect to the Russian Tundra Peasants, only 15.3% married another Tundra Peasant. Curiously, the Tundra Peasant men and women both married outside their own group very frequently and not, as might be expected, just the men due to the shortage of women, which existed due to the fact the majority of the Russian explorers had been men. In fact the women even topped the men with 70.8 % of their marriages being to a non-Tundra Peasant, whereas for the men this was only 67.8%. The ethnic groups they married into most frequently were for the women the Tundra Yakuts (39.6%) and the Evenk clan called Dolgan (18.6%). The same pattern applies to the men, who married Tundra Yakut women in 29.9% of the cases, and Dolgan women in 14.9%.

For the Tungusic groups (comprising the Dolgan, Dongot, Edyan, Karanto and Evenks), marriages with non-Tungusic people were not as overwhelming as it was for the Tundra Peasants to marry outside of their ethnic group, but they were still

very common. Of all 259 Tungusic marriages registered between 1727 and 1883, 44.8% took place between two Tungusic partners, whereas 55.2% married a non-Tungusic partner, who could be of Turkic (31.7%), Russian (20.8%) or Samoyedic origin (2.7%). As for the Tundra Peasants, there is no notable difference between the choice of partners for men or for women.

For the Turkic groups (including the Tundra Yakuts and the Yessey Yakuts), the pattern is very similar to the Tungusic groups: 43.44% of the marriages took place between two Turkic individuals, whereas in 56.6% a partner with a different ethnic background was found. Of these 56.6%, 30.7% married a Tungusic partner, 24% a Tundra Peasant, and 1.9% a Samoyedic individual. Considering these data, Dolgikh has good reason to believe that interethnic marriages were very common among the ethnic groups who inhabited the Taimyr Peninsula, and that as a result ethnic boundaries became less prominent among this particular assemblage of people.

Any impediments to interethnic marriages were smoothed out even more after the introduction of Christianity, which created an additional bond between the people who were baptised as opposed to those who were not. In the eyes of the Russians it was the only way for the indigenous people to lose their 'alienness' and to become part of Russian society (Slezkine 1994: 42-43). The first church was built in Khatanga in the first decade of the 18th century, and the Dolgans are reputed for being not only the first, but also relatively willing, to adopt this new religion. This is one of the reasons why they were later characterised by Russian ethnographers (e.g. Popov 1930 in Anderson 2000: 81) as 'avant garde' people of the Taimyr. The relative ease with which the Dolgans were converted is very different to the reluctance shown by other indigenous groups, as for example the Nganasan who actively practiced shamanism until the 20th century (Forsyth 1992: 178) and never really embraced Christianity at all. Nonetheless, official baptism did not mean that traditional religious practices were instantly abandoned. Christianity was expressed primarily by the adoption of Russian names and surnames, but traditional worshipping and shamanism remained vivid until the 20th century. The Soviet regime radically put an end to this after it 'unmasked' the shamans as exploiters and they were forced to stop their activities through repression or execution (Slezkine 1994: 226, Ziker 1998: 98).

Thus, encounters between Russians and native Siberians have taken place from the very beginning of the colonisation of Siberia. However, while the lives of most indigenous people began to change from the moment the Russians appeared,

the most fundamental transformations took place in the 20th century. In part, this had to do with the increased scale on which the Russian influence was exerted, but more importantly with a conceptual change in Russian ideology about the role of the indigenous people in Russian society, in particular in the Soviet Union. This ideological change percolated into the realms of politics and ethnography, which in turn led to radical transformations of society, dramatically affecting the lives of the indigenous people as well as of the Russians themselves.

If in the 17th and 18th century the prevailing opinion was that the native Siberians were inferior savages one needed to protect oneself from, the spirit of German romanticism of the 19th century changed their status into superior innocents that needed to be protected (Slezkine 1994: 73-74). Whether superior or inferior to the Russians, they had always been conceived of as principally different. This 'alien' status could have negative as well as some positive consequences for the Siberians. Thus, while there is clearly nothing advantageous in the fact that it was not considered immoral to exploit the indigenous population for the delivery of fur and services, in hindsight there were certain advantages in the fact that they were never forced to merge completely with Russian society. As long as they delivered their *yasak* on time, they could still more or less do what they wanted. Thus, this 'otherness' had always allowed for a certain distance and autonomy in that it justified the maintenance of their own way of life.

This situation changed radically with the establishment of the Soviet regime in the 20th century. The new ideology, which promoted progress and equality among all people, required unconditional participation in the building and realisation of a socialist state, regardless of ethnic background (Slezkine 1994: Ch. 6). To make this ambition a success, people had to be enlightened, educated and integrated, and this required a conceptual change from regarding the Siberian natives as 'aliens' to treating them as 'comrades'. Despite the good intentions behind this ideology, the imposed integration and the paternalistic decision to 'educate' the indigenous people and 'develop' them into full members of the Soviet society in a sense interfered more fundamentally with their traditional way of life than the initial Russian invasion had done, and for many people even destroyed it.

2.3.3 SOVIET PERIOD (1917 - 1989)

Key events started after the Revolution in 1917 and the following Civil War. In the initial period after the takeover of the Soviet regime, the new ideology of the Communist Party and following political measures must have been received as an improvement by the Siberian peoples. However, by the end of the 1920's ideas were taken to an extreme, leading to extreme consequences for the population, since the importance of the Soviet State as a whole began to overrule the importance of the individuals who had to live in it.

But the start looked promising. After three centuries of colonisation and institutionalised inequality⁸ the Bolshevik Party published in 1917 the 'Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia'. This document granted equality and sovereignty to all nationalities and thus changed the position of the Siberian natives fundamentally, at least in theory. According to Forsyth (1992: 241):

In Lenin's theoretical view differences of nationality were trivial compared with class divisions and allegiances, so that autonomy was simply a transitional stage towards centralisation (...)

whereby the final goal was the "eventual merging of all nations" (Lenin cited in Forsyth 1992: 241). This foregrounding of equality and sovereignty clashed most strikingly with the utterly unequal *yasak* relation, which had characterised the interaction between Russians and indigenous people so far. Therefore payment of tribute was abolished immediately in 1917. Other initiatives to level out differences between societies and to eliminate the presumed 'backwardness' of the indigenous Siberians included the distribution of grain and medicine, the cancelling of debts to traders that had accumulated in almost every Siberian family over the centuries, and later obligatory education and attempts to industrialisation (Forsyth 1992: 243, Ziker 1998: 86). While these changes may have provided a significant short-term improvement in the Arctic regions in comparison to previous conditions, it is obvious that in the long run these

⁸ This inequality was maintained between Russians and native Siberians, as is reflected by terms such as 'alien' to denote people in their home country (Slezkine 1994: 84), as well as by Speranskiy's (1822) three-way classification of societies. These were settled, nomadic and wandering people in decreasing hierarchical order and every society had to be allocated to one of these levels (Slezkine 1994: 84, Raeff 1956 (cited by Anderson 2000: 79)).

measures had negative side effects. The interference of the Soviet State with the traditional lifestyle of the Siberian hunters, fishermen and herders disrupted their self-sufficiency and increased their dependency on the Russian state. While the intentions may have been different, this development did not in any way contribute to the foreshadowed 'sovereignty' as desired by the Declaration of Rights.

Other consequences of the establishment of Communism were disastrous for the indigenous population from the start. When Dudinka fell to the Red Army at the end of the Civil War in 1920, Russians and indigenous people were pressed into military service, and some groups retreated into the tundra where hunger forced them to slaughter their own reindeer. As a consequence they had to rely on others who owned more reindeer, thus creating an inequality in wealth that was later vigorously attacked by the same people who had generated it, the Communist Party (Ziker 1998: 85, Forsyth 1992: 248).

In 1924 a special committee was established to defend the interests of the small peoples of the north and to protect them from further exploitation. Its official name was the Committee for the Assistance to the Peoples of the Northern Borderlands, or in short the Committee of the North⁹ (Slezkine 1994: 152). On the Taimyr, these plans materialised most clearly in the building of trading stations, the so-called *faktorii*, along the Khatanga Trading Way to bypass exploitation by commercial merchants and local dealers (Slezkine 1994: 166, Ziker 1998: 82). In addition, shops were opened, schools were built where, and due to the lack of educated local people, the language of instruction was predominantly Russian.

The members of the Committee consisted of high party officials, but also included famous ethnographers¹⁰. Although the official mission of the committee was to protect the interests of the northern peoples, according to Slezkine,

the Committee's true and sacred vocation was to assist the small peoples in their difficult climb up the evolutionary ladder. Cultural progress meant getting rid of backwardness, and backwardness, in the very traditional view of the committee members, consisted of dirt, ignorance, alcoholism and the oppression of women. (Slezkine 1994: 155-156)

⁹ As Forsyth has it, its task was to promote "the planned organisation of the small peoples of the North in respect of economic, judicial-administrative and cultural-medical matters" (Forsyth 1992: 245).

¹⁰ These included e.g. V.G. Bogoraz and L.Ya. Shternberg (Slezkine 1994)

This may explain why in 1926 a law was adopted by which all 'primitive customs' were outlawed, including clan vengeance, bride-price and marriages between minors (Ziker 1998: 90, Forsyth 1992: 244). While such laws were presented as measures to protect the interest of the native population, it cannot have been pure coincidence that they also exactly fitted the Party's idea of how to transform the native Siberians as quickly as possible into workers for the socialist state.

In accordance with the Leninist idea of self-determination and autonomy, which by Stalin was explicitly equated with the eternal fight against backwardness and in favour of progress, autonomous regions were created for the native populations of Siberia, one of them being the Taimyr Autonomous Region. Ideally, every territory should coincide with one nationality and one language. This concern transpires clearly from the ethnographic literature of that time, in particular in situations where this match was not so obvious, as for example for the Dolgans (Anderson 2000: 74). Since from the very start the Dolgans had been described as 'Yakut with Tungus influence' or as a 'mixed people' (Middendorff 1875: 1476), how to classify them with respect to ethnic identity and territory was not obvious. No wonder that we see an increase in ethnographic accounts of the Dolgans in these years trying to clarify this issue (see Section 2.4.2 below). It also explains, in addition to the motivation of the 'fight against backwardness', the intensified attempts of the State to rule out nomadism, which naturally pays no attention to administrative boundaries. In this political climate, the Taimyr (Dolgano-Nenetskiy) Autonomous Region was established on the 10th of December 1930, reflecting the names of the two numerically largest ethnic groups that inhabited the territory (i.e. the Dolgans and the Nenets).

The period of relative freedom and humane changes that had characterised the 1920's came to an abrupt end in 1929 when Stalin started the collectivisation program, which was meant "to exorcise backwardness through a total class war" (Slezkine 2006: 187) and was in his opinion the only real way to progress and to the ideal classless society. However, what to do with societies that have no obvious classes, particularly if they are the most backward societies where progress is most needed? The answer was simple: if there are no classes to battle against, you create them. Previously classless reindeer-herding communities were forced through a stage of an artificially imposed class system, which had to be purged before they were reborn in the ideal society where everybody was equal. Instead of letting them retain their classless social structures, they were forcefully moulded into Stalinist ideology.

Reindeer herders with more reindeer than others overnight became *kulaks*¹¹, shamans and princes became exploiters. Their property could be confiscated for the State, and exploiters themselves were put to work or liquidated. The expropriation of large numbers of reindeer served the State from two sides. On the one hand, it weeded out the exploiting *kulaks* from society, and on the other hand, the confiscation of the reindeer served well the utopian idea to turn the Russian Arctic into the largest reindeer farm (*olen'sovkhoz*) on the planet. Soon the Taimyr would be an enormous reindeer laboratory occupying the surface of Great Britain and containing 20,000 reindeer (Anderson 2000: 49).

Needless to say, such measures were not warmly welcomed by the indigenous population. While there is little documented evidence of armed resistance against the Russians on the Taimyr, the Volochanka rebellion of 1932 showed that it certainly happened. That year, the inhabitants of the Avam tundra received the message that four thousand reindeer were to be expropriated. Horrified by this news, Evenk, Sakha and Dolgan people near the posts of Dolgany, Avam and Volochanka took to arms and killed 20 party members, injured 14 and lost four of their own men. It may not have been a long-term victory but at the time the resolution of the conflict took a surprising turn. Instead of executing the 'rebels' of the tundra, the owner of the reindeer farm was arrested under a charge of theft (Anderson 2000: 49-50). However, such successful opposition was rare, and by the end of the 1930s the majority of the indigenous population belonged to a collective farm, as did 25% of the reindeer in the region (Stetsyuk et al., 1990: 6 in Ziker 1998: 98)).

The black page in history of World War II severely affected the lives of Russians and indigenous people all across the Soviet Union, including the Taimyr. In contrast to World War I, where many indigenous populations were exempt from military service, now nobody was excused, and while the men had to fight for survival on the front line, the women, old men and children struggled for their lives in the villages (Forsyth 1992: 347-350). The War also interrupted the collectivisation process initiated in the 1930's, but it was eagerly resumed after the War had ended. The post-war period is characterised by bringing collectivisation to an even higher level. Many people who had gone through the collectivisation process in the 1930's, had to do this once again in the 1950's in the light of Stalin's

¹¹ *Kulaks* are wealthy and independent farmers, both characteristics, which go against the Soviet idea of a good citizen. They were considered class enemies of the poor peasant, and therefore had to be eliminated.

consolidation (*ukrupnenie*). The collective farms (*kolkhozy*) were fused into even larger state farms (*sovkhozy*) and entire settlements were moved to the *sovkhos* territory (Forsyth 1992: 362). On the Taimyr this meant that many smaller and unprofitable trading posts or *faktorii* along the Khatanga Trading Way closed down and people were compelled move into more compact areas around the state farms (Ziker 1998: 104).

At these state farms there was no room for individual differences. Thus, the *sovkhozy* became an amalgamation of people of different ethnic origins. Presumably this was inspired by the practical motivations of making the farm function most efficiently, but the mixing of people of different ethnic origins was also part of the plan. Only when people overcame ethnicity and became Soviet citizens instead would the ideal of a completely equal society be realised (Ziker 1998: 106). As a result, clan awareness further disappeared and was replaced by the larger unit of nationality instead. This was not yet quite satisfactory in the grand scheme of Soviet ideology, but it was a step in the right direction. Members of different Evenk clans would now refer to themselves as Evenks instead of naming their clan. It is also the time that the Dolgans, who had so far been described as consisting of different clans, were firmly established as a single nationality (Dolgikh 1963). This kind of development was not unique to the Taimyr. A similar change is testified in Turkic groups where a diversity of clans came to be 'summarised' under the names Khakas and Altai, which are similar situations where several "newly 'consolidated' nationalities occupy compact territories" (Forsyth 1992: 363). What was left of traditional religion disappeared and atheist celebrations, such as the day of the reindeer herder or fisherman took their place (Forsyth 1992: 365).

It is curious that the Dolgans were the only completely collectivised people by World War II, when their reindeer played an important role in the transport of Russians between the Yenisey and Khatanga Rivers (Forsyth 1992: 386). Nonetheless, they were only semi-sedentary. Until the 1970's many families lived in *baloks* (see Section 1.3.1) and tents and they visited the settlements only for supplies or to pick up their children from boarding schools. However, in the 1970's people were forced to permanently settle in proper houses (Ziker 1998:109). Often they had to leave their traditional territory and were planted into villages "for the sake of administrative convenience" (Forsyth 1992: 399), and other smaller settlements were "liquidated" as they were considered non-viable (*ibid.*)

Despite these disruptive measures, material conditions were rather good in the 1970's and 1980's. Frequent flights connected the villages to the towns and allowed many people to go on holidays to the south. There were sufficient consumer goods, which may have had to do with the Dudinka port that in 1978 was opened all year round¹².

2.3.4 POST SOVIET PERIOD (1989 - PRESENT)

While the *perestroika* and the following collapse of the Soviet Union introduced more freedom in certain domains, it caused serious limitations in others, in particular with respect to material goods. This was felt very notably in the remote areas, which through their integration into the Soviet society over the previous 70 years had lost their self-sufficiency and had become dependent on imported goods and services. Through the collapse of the entire system these could no longer be provided. Transport services decreased or disappeared entirely, imported goods became scarce and prices rocketed. With the collapse of the state farms the main provider of employment disappeared, many people lost their jobs and found consolation in alcohol. Too much time had passed to return to the traditional life of hunting, fishing, and reindeer herding in the way that had supported Dolgan families for centuries. The new generation had not acquired these skills very well because there had been no need to do so and also they had different ambitions after having grown up in 'Russian' society.

By now more than 20 years have passed, and although there are some signs of improvement, the situation in most villages still shows many of these features, and people often feel neglected and forgotten by the state. Of course, this is not the whole story. Schools are being run by enthusiastic teachers, club houses organise events and celebrations, but it cannot be denied that living conditions are far from perfect.

¹² Information taken from: www.taimyr24, accessed on January 27, 2012.

2.4 ETHNOGRAPHY

2.4.1 RUSSIAN EMPIRE (1638 - 1917)

From the 17th century onward, the name ‘Dolgan’ or ‘Dulgaan’ appears in records kept by Russian tax collectors. However, at that time ‘Dolgan’ did not yet denote the ethnic group or nationality it represents today, but was used as the name of one particular Tungusic clan. Unfortunately, we do not know which criteria were used for the categorisation of people as Dolgan. If it were based on self-identification of the people, or on the overall package of culture, lifestyle and language, then this Dolgan clan most probably spoke a Tungusic language as well.

However, Ubryatova points out in her discussion of the document from 1638 in which the Dolgan were first mentioned (see Section 2.3.2.2 and Ubryatova 1985: 8) that a match of language and self-identification cannot be taken for granted. The document refers to a headman or prince who had leadership over clans belonging to more than one ethnic group. Considering that power and prestige often play an important role in the choice of language (variety) it is quite possible that the dominance of the ruling group was eventually transmitted to the level of language. Members of the non-ruling group (Evenks) would have learned the language of the ruling group (Sakha), and may have even adopted it in situations of intense contact due to its higher prestige, resulting in language shift. This is important, because there is evidence that such conditions prevailed in the area of the Lena and lower Vilyuy River, where both the Tungusic Dolgan clan and the Turkic Sakha clans were governed by a single Sakha headman (*tojon*), whose name was Dygyna (ibid: 8). Ubryatova argues that this fact may have been an important motivation for the hypothesised language shift in the non-ruling Tungusic Dolgan group to the language of the ruling Sakha, thus providing the basis for the Dolgan language spoken today (ibid: 8, see also Middendorff 1875: 1467, who even mentions a source from 1632).

An attempt to reconstruct the timing of this potential shift is undertaken by the Turcologist Stachowski. In a short paper (Stachowski 1996), in which he refers mainly to Ubryatova’s discussion of the 1638 document, he argues that by that year the Dolgan clan must have already shifted to Sakha. However, he bases his argumentation on the assumption that by 1638 the Dolgan clan was already living on the territory of the Taimyr Peninsula, which is, as far as I can tell, a misinterpretation of the facts presented in Ubryatova’s work. In his 1996 paper, Stachowski takes two hypotheses as a given: a) between 1628 and 1630 the Dolgans

were still living in the Lena and Vilyuy area, and b) in 1638, they were living on the Taimyr. Evidence for his first assumption comes from historical records written by two Polish convicts. They were sent to the Lena and Vilyuy area to collect *yasak* in these years and it is reported that they encountered the Dolgans in this region. His second assumption is based on the excerpts from the 1638 document cited in Ubryatova, in which he reads that by that time the Dolgans were living on the Taimyr Peninsula. Given these two 'facts', he concludes that the migration of the Tungusic Dolgan clan to the northwest must have taken place between 1630 and 1638. Since at that time the majority of the population on the Taimyr Peninsula were Samoyeds (speaking Samoyedic languages), there would have been no reason, perhaps not even a possibility, for the Tungusic Dolgan to shift to Sakha after their arrival on the Taimyr, i.e. after 1638. Thus, he argues, the language shift must have taken place before they started their northward migration and after they had been subsumed under Tungusic populations by the Polish convicts, i.e. between 1628 and 1638 (Stachowski 1996: 129). However, Stachowski's second assumption is highly questionable. Unless he possesses more detailed information about the 1638 document than is cited in Ubryatova's work, which he does not seem to, there is no reason to assume that by 1638 the Dolgan had already migrated to the Taimyr Peninsula. The excerpts in Ubryatova's grammar clearly state that the Dolgan still inhabited the area of the Lena and Vilyuy Rivers, which is a significant distance away from the Taimyr: "And on the Lena river and the mouth of the Vilyuy live Dolgans and Yakuts..." (Russkaya istoricheskaya biblioteka, p. 968, cited in Ubryatova 1985: 8, translation mine).

An additional document reports Sakha and Tungus clans hiding from the *yasak* collectors, and reveals their hiding place by saying that they "lived in the Vilyuy heights and mountains and did not give *yasak* for over two years until 1644." (Dopolneniya k Aktam istoricheskim, p. 37, cited in Ubryatova 1985: 9 translation mine). After that, Ubryatova continues, the fights between the *yasak*-collecting Cossacks and the indigenous people, including the Dolgans, continued for several decades. Some Dolgans migrated to the east and mixed with the Tungusic Evens, whereas others "lived for a long time in isolation in the heights of the Vilyuy, and then little by little moved to the territory that is the Taimyr Autonomous Region today" (Ubryatova 1985: 9 translation mine). Thus, the 1638 document makes no mention of Dolgan people on the Taimyr, and it does not provide any clue as to whether the shift to Sakha had already taken place or not.

The first explicit statement about the language of the Dolgans appears some 200 years later when the Finnish linguist Castrén and the German naturalist Middendorff were sent on ethnographic expeditions to study the people in the Siberian Arctic and to “clarify a confusing overlap of the peoples inhabiting the lands between the Lena and the Ob’.” (Anderson 2000: 79). By this time, the Dolgans are located on the Taimyr Peninsula. This is also the first time they appear in a context of ethnographic interest, instead of simply as a ‘source’ for *yasak*-extraction (Anderson 2000: 79). The ‘confusing overlap’ concerned the Dolgans in particular, who were sometimes referred to as ‘Tungus’ (their name), and sometimes as ‘Yakut’ (their language). However, both Castrén and Middendorff seem convinced that the Dolgans (or also Dolgasch) are predominantly Sakha, but their identity is mixed with Tungusic features as a result of their close vicinity to the latter. According to Castrén, the Dolgans consist of three clans: Dolgan, Edyan and Dongot (Castrén 1856 cited in Middendorff 1875: 1473). While elsewhere these clans are characterised as Tungusic, Castrén identifies them as Sakha (‘Jakutenstämme’), based on his observation that they speak Sakha. Middendorff describes them as “a bunch of emigrated Yakuts” (1875: 1467), but finishes his account with a more nuanced characterisation:

Thus the Dolgan are ... a very distinct, very interesting *mixed people*, in which dominance of the Yakut distinctly emerges in everything.¹³

Both authors characterise the language of the Dolgan people as clearly Turkic (Castrén 1856, Middendorff 1875). Middendorff even describes it as “pure Yakut”, and disagrees with earlier characterisations by Krivoschapkin (1865) who ascribes to the Dolgan people a language similar to Tungusic:

In any case Krivoschapkin is mistaken when he considers the language of the Dolgan to be Tungusic. Without doubt, it is pure Yakut.¹⁴

¹³ “Die Dolganen sind eben ... ein ganz entschiedenes, sehr interessantes *Mischvolk*, bei dem in Allem die Präponderanz des Jakutischen entschieden hervortritt“ (Middendorff 1875: 1476, italics and translation mine).

¹⁴ “Es ist jedenfalls ein Irrthum wenn Kriwoshapkin die Sprache der Dolganen für Tungusisch hält; sie ist unzweifelhaft reines jakutisch.” (Middendorff 1875: 1475 translation mine).

2.4.2. SOVIET UNION (1917-1989)

Compared to the sporadic references to the Dolgans during the time of the Russian Empire, they received much more attention from Russian ethnographers and linguists after the establishment of the Soviet Union in 1917. This was not just inspired by an increased interest in ethnography for purely scientific purposes, but was also motivated by political, ideological and administrative changes, which required a clear categorisation of people into 'nationalities', a need which had not existed before.

As the Soviet ideal of being a 'Soviet citizen' gained importance, individual differences were increasingly being wiped out and larger units such as nationalities became more important than the individual clans or tribal affiliations that people used to identify with in the past (see also Section 2.3.3). In addition, the 'administrative clans' that had channelled the collection of tribute during the Russian Empire were reformed by the Soviet government into new administrative units based on nationality to distribute the central state subsidies (Anderson 2000: 82). Therefore it became an ideological as well as a political necessity to divide the population into clear-cut nationalities. Every individual could belong to only one nationality, and terms such as 'Dolgan-Tungus' or 'Dolgano-Yakuts' (Popov, archival data, AMAE 14-1-151, in Anderson 2000: 83) should henceforth belong to the past. These terms already show that the Dolgans occupied an ambiguous position from the start due to the Tungusic as well as Turkic influences in their community. In addition, there was uncertainty with respect to their status as either a single Tungus clan or as a separate ethnic group or even nationality. This explains why the Dolgans have figured prominently in a number of ethnographic and linguistic works between 1917 and 1989, most notably by A.A. Popov, B.O. Dolgikh and E.I. Ubryatova.

All these scholars were indisputably devoted ethnographers, historians or linguists, and there is no doubt that their interest in unravelling the identity of the people inhabiting the fringes of the earth was genuine. However, it is questionable to what extent the published texts correspond to the real opinion of the individual researchers, and to what extent they were edited by Soviet politicians to support and propagate their own convictions. It is nothing new that during the Soviet Period published materials could be severely censored, and there is concrete evidence that certain ethnographic information on the Dolgans underwent the same procedure (Anderson 2000: 82-84), which makes it precarious to rely blindly

on historical materials from that period. Nonetheless, the expeditions of the Soviet ethnographers and linguists provide precious and invaluable information on the indigenous people of Siberia when used with care. A summary of the most influential literature on the Dolgan people, their ethnic composition and their origins will be given below.

In 1930 A.A. Popov set out to the Taimyr National Region (which was established in the same year) to study the ethnography, kinship and material culture of the Dolgans and to “link the Dolgan to [one of] the Turkish, Tungus-Manchurian, or Paleoasiatic groups” (KTsKhIDNI: 28-1-24:1 cited in Anderson 2000: 83). Popov characterises them as the main population of the Taimyr National Region as well as the ‘most advanced’ in terms of culture (see Section 2.3.2.3). With respect to their ethnic composition, Popov distinguishes a ‘core’ or the ‘real Dolgans’, and a group of ‘other Yakutised people’ who have also become Dolgan. This core consists of four Tungus clans, Dolgan, Edyan, Karanto and Dongot (Popov [1931] 2003: 60), and the other group comprises Russian Tundra Peasants and local Evenks and Sakha people who live in the region.

However, his initially clear definition becomes rather opaque as the description progresses. At present, it is impossible to distinguish the two groups, which evokes the question how Popov himself drew the dividing line in the first place. He concludes by saying that “in fact, the entire native population of the Avam and Khatanga districts can be considered Dolgan” (Popov [1931] 2003: 60) with the exception of the Samoyedic Nganasan and certain Evenk groups south of the Kheta River, thus linking them to a territory rather than defining them by ethnic affiliation. However, despite the confusion, the overall flavour of Popov’s work is a presentation of the Dolgans as a clearly defined nationality with a distinct ethnonym, inhabiting a distinct administrative territory.

With regard to their language, Popov postulates that the Dolgans speak a dialect of Sakha, characterised by a high proportion of Evenki words. This dialect developed in the 18th and 19th centuries when the Tungusic clans moved from the Lena and Vilyuy rivers to the territory of the Taimyr and adopted the Sakha language. Through a common culture and mixed marriages the ethnic boundaries between these groups became less and less pronounced and eventually disappeared, resulting in the people we call Dolgans today.

Anderson, who reviews Popov’s work in detail, remarks that Popov’s unpublished manuscripts differ significantly from the final published version. In his drafts, Popov avoids any explicit statement with respect to the clear-cut

definition of the ethnic composition of the Dolgans and prefers to stick to hyphenated ethnonyms such as 'Dolgano-Yakut', because "the Dolgan don't have a general name of their nationality, every clan has its own name." (Popov [1931] 2003: 13) Not surprisingly, such passages were heavily criticised by reviewers for reasons alluded to above, and had to be rewritten until the Dolgans appeared as the unambiguous nationality desired by the Soviet system. Thus, it is clear that the reviewer's ideological framework penetrated Popov's writing, and that the publicly accessible version of his work does not exactly match Popov's original impressions, to say the least.

The most authoritative material on the identity and ethnic origins of the Dolgan is the work by B.O. Dolgikh. On three expeditions to Arctic Siberia he collected very detailed information on the populations of the Taimyr Peninsula and neighbouring regions. On the first two expeditions, which took place in 1926-1927 and 1934-1935, he went along as a census taker and collectivisation economist, and only on the last one in 1938-1939 was he officially appointed as an ethnographer (Anderson 2000: 85). Dolgikh published a number of studies on this subject, but his most famous work is without doubt 'The origin of the Dolgans'¹⁵, which was published in 1963. In this study he describes the ethnic affiliation, self-identification, and origins of the Dolgan people in meticulous detail, tracing back clans, and sometimes even single individuals, to when and where they were first registered, and how they arrived in their current territory.

In this work, Dolgikh presents the Dolgans as a stable consolidated ethnic group in a similar way to Popov's official version several decades earlier. They are linked to the territory of the Taimyr Peninsula and are clearly separated from the neighbouring Evenk, Sakha and Nganasan populations. However, in earlier work he was not always so certain about the definition of this group, or sometimes even about its very existence. Since unfortunately not all of Dolgikh's original materials are at my disposal, in the following I will rely mainly on Anderson's review of them (Anderson 2000: 74-96).

Dolgikh's first appearance on the stage of the discussion on Dolgan identity is much earlier than 1963. In 1929 he publishes a field report on the basis of his first expedition to the Taimyr as a census taker. In this report he suggests that the patchwork of different peoples on the Peninsula be divided into five 'socio-economical groups':

¹⁵ Original: "Происхождение долган".

- a) Samoyeds-Tavgij
- b) Dolgan (Yakut of the tundra)
- c) Tungus
- d) Yakut (Yakut of the forest)
- e) riverbank Samoyed

These groupings are clearly not based on nationality, but rather on the basis of self-identification and geographical environment, which in turn determines their economic position. This is most clearly exemplified by his categories 'Yakut' and 'Dolgan': they are both classified as subgroups of 'Yakuts', distinguished only by their geographical location (forest vs. tundra) and thus by economic occupation. This is roughly in line with Middendorff's and Castrén's identification of the Dolgans as a Sakha tribe. It is also worth noting that this classification was proposed before the establishment of the Taimyr National District as a political unit in 1930 and therefore before the need to create a neat match between the names of the political entity and its inhabitants.

Only a few years later Dolgikh revised his opinion significantly. In 1935 he sent a report to the Provincial Party officials, in which he says that the best classification of the Dolgans has now become 'Yakuticised Evenkis' (TsGARF A310-18-67: 97-98 cited in Anderson 2000: 86). However, such detailed division of populations would impede cultural-educational work so therefore "it seems possible to consolidate the Yakut, the 'Dolgan', and the Tundra Peasants into one national group: the Yakuts" (ibid.). It may seem odd to group the Dolgans with the Sakha after having just classified them as Evenks, but Dolgikh's decision seems to be founded mainly on the common language among the groups, which was Sakha. After his advice was adopted by the Party officials, the number of 'Dolgan' on the Taimyr dropped to zero overnight, the ethnonym disappeared from all official documents, and was replaced by 'modern' terms such as 'Sakha'¹⁶. This is remarkable, considering the fact that only four years earlier a huge administrative territory was established (Taimyrskiy Dolgano-Nenetskiy Natsional'nyy Okrug) carrying the name 'Dolgan' to reflect it being the largest population in the region.

Their reappearance occurred as promptly as their disappearance. While there is evidence that Dolgikh himself had been pushing for the return of the Dolgans onto the ethnographic map as early as 1954 (Anderson 2000: 86), this recommendation was recognised only in 1961, after the return of an ethnographic

¹⁶ In these years, other terms of 'imperial chauvinism' such as Tungus and Samoyed were also being replaced, with Evenk and Nenets used instead (Anderson 2000: 86).

expedition to the Taimyr Peninsula, which had set out to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the Taimyr National District in 1960. On arrival, the members of the expedition were surprised to discover that one of the peoples that determined the name of the district was missing on its own territory. The change of their ethnonym from Dolgan to Sakha had had the consequence that in the entire Taimyr (Dolgano-Nenets) National District there was no official sign of the Dolgans. On return, the head of the expedition pointed out that “there is a complete lack of data on the leading national group of the Taimyr (Dolgano-Nenets) District - the Dolgans”. He continues that those ‘Dolgan’ call themselves ‘Sakha’, but do not identify with the “Yakut character of this term”, by which he refers to the Sakha living across the border in the Sakha Republic. The conclusion was that the term Dolgan needed to be reintroduced, in order to restore the match between administrative and ethnographic boundaries, and to do justice to an apparent difference between the ‘Sakha’ of the Taimyr and the ‘Sakha’ of the Sakha Republic.

Dolgikh was again the right man to do this. His ‘The origin of the Dolgans’ is a confirmation, almost a plea, to recognise the Dolgans as a distinct nationality. If in the past there was uncertainty regarding this matter, so he says, this can be justified by the fact that the Dolgans are a very young nationality, which was still in the process of formation. Today, however, this process is completed and the Dolgans are firmly established and distinct from all their neighbouring ethnic groups. Dolgikh certainly recognises, and even highlights, the ethnic diversity within the Dolgan population, but this does not inconvenience him at all. His *a priori* conviction about their current unity is so strong, that the diverse origins are at most a matter of interest, not a reason to question the appropriateness of merging them into a single ethnic group.

Through exhaustive study of archival materials, Dolgikh (and following him Ubryatova 1985) breaks down the Dolgan population into as many as nine different ethnic components: Dulgan, Dongot, Edyan, Karanto, Yakut, tundra Yakut, Tundra Peasants, Evenks, and Enets. The first three (Dulgan, Dongot and Edyan) he groups together as ‘Dolgan’, the members of the Karanto clan as ‘Evenk’. This differs from Popov’s description, who lists all four of them as Evenks. The Yakuts he specifies as coming from Lake Yessej and the Kotuy and Popigay rivers, and the Tundra Peasants are classified as Russians. The Evenks come from the councils Letneye and Ilimpeyskoye, and the Enets are a few individuals who adopted the “Dolgan dialect of the Yakut language” (Dolgikh 1963: 93).

Using the census numbers from 1926-1927, in the collection of which he participated himself, Dolgikh calculates the proportion with which each ethnic component is represented in the Dolgan population. These numbers are presented in Table 2.2. He comments that these percentages are not based on accurate numbers but that they appear to him as ‘most probable’ (Dolgikh 1963: 128). As will be shown in Section 2.6.3, his estimates are strikingly similar to the latest results from genetic analyses.

Table 2.2. Proportions of different ethnic components in the Dolgan population

<i>Ethnic group</i>	<i>Clan</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Tungus	Dolgan	50-52%
	Dongot	
	Edyan	
	Karanto	
	Evenk	
Yakut	Yakut	30-33%
	Tundra Yakut	
Russian	Tundra Peasant	15%
Samoyed	Enets	3-4%

A crucial role in the consolidation of these different groups into one “uniform mass of Dolgans” (Dolgikh 1963: 96) is ascribed to the Khatanga Trading Way. This corridor from Dudinka in the west across the Taimyr Peninsula to the east enabled the flow of goods and people, and required more interethnic communication than in other more isolated parts of the Taimyr Peninsula. The trade along the Khatanga Trading Way was as lucrative as it was harsh. Indigenous people had a greater chance to acquire imported goods such as tea, flour, sugar and tobacco, while at the same time they ran the risk to be exploited for their services, in particular for providing transport for the Russian trading caravans, which was a major disruption to the lives of the indigenous population.

Despite these risks, history shows that the Khatanga Trading Way kept attracting people from various ethnic origins, in particular Sakha, different Tungusic groups and Russians. Gradually, intergroup differences became less distinct, and a common mode of subsistence (trade, hunting, reindeer herding and fishing), a common language (Sakha, which served as a *lingua franca*), the adoption of the orthodox religion and intermarriage between the groups (see

Section 2.3.2.3) increasingly obscured the dividing lines between the different ethnic groups (Dolgikh 1963: 136). This blurring and eventual eradication of ethnic boundaries is what Dolgikh describes as 'Dolganisation'. Dolgikh's description pictures this development almost like a chemical reaction, which took place to whoever entered the 'reactor' of the Trading Way. Fuelled by the attraction of goods, services and information, this reactor fused into a unified mass of Dolgans whoever came into its sphere.

While the Khatanga Trading Way may have been a point of interethnic encounters since the 17th century, Dolgikh is convinced that at that time the ethnic identity of the Dolgans as we know it today had not developed yet. In his view 'Dolganisation' started only in the 19th century, when 'a new [name] came into use, [which] testifies that here began forming a new ethnographic community, which did not suit any of the old ethnic names...' (Dolgikh 1963: 107). The establishment of proper trading stations along the Khatanga Trading Way in the 1920's intensified this development and by 1926 the consolidation of the Dolgan as a nationality had in principle been completed (ibid: 106, 137). By that time, he argues, there were almost no families in the area along the Khatanga Trading Way that did not have mixed marriages (ibid: 136) and did not share the Dolgan dialect of Sakha.

The next leap forward in consolidation was the creation of the Taimyr national district, which officially carried the name of the Dolgans. This was followed by the introduction of collective farms and of boarding schools, where people from all different ethnic backgrounds came together and ethnic boundaries were of no importance (1963: 137).

In the light of the great detail with which Dolgikh traces back the component groups of the Dolgans, it is remarkable how easily he sweeps under the carpet the mismatch between their official naming and their self-identification. He admits that most of the component groups do not call themselves 'Dolgan', but refer to their clan names such as Dongot, Edyan, Karanto. The people he classifies as 'Yakut' in fact call themselves 'Sakha' and the Tundra Peasants call themselves 'Yakut' or 'peasant' (ibid: 104-105). However, Dolgikh smoothes over this mismatch with the rather paternalistic explanation that the merging process was a fact, but had not yet been recognised by the people themselves, or as Anderson words it, it was just an "empirical anomaly which only establishes that the Dolgan are a nation in the process of creation" (Anderson 2000: 87). Dolgikh treats the confusing nomenclature of the Dolgans with the same superficiality. Just as he

presents their consolidation into a nationality as a given, he also presents their appearance and disappearance throughout history as simple facts. The complicated ethnic composition of the Dolgan people, and the infelicitous choice of the label 'Sakha' for two populations that for Dolgikh are clearly distinct in both ethnic affiliation and language (i.e. the Sakha and the Dolgan), should according to him suffice as an explanation for their impermanent existence throughout history (Dolgikh 1963: 106).

It is striking to observe how each of these key events in the formation of the Dolgan as a separate ethnolinguistic group reserves a prominent role for external factors. Each change of name or identity was brought about by Russian officials and the indigenous people themselves seemed to have no say in these decisions. The literature suggests that the re-establishment of the match between the administrative and ethnographic boundaries of the Dolgans was the mirror image of how the administrative region had been created. Instead of naming the region after the people who already inhabited it, now the people were named after the region they happened to inhabit, and their language seemed to play an equally important role: "Thus, we consider Dolgans the entire current Yakut-speaking population of the Taimyr National Region"¹⁷.

Thus by the end of the Soviet Period, the status of the Dolgans as a nationality had been secured. However, it remains questionable to what extent this happened as a response to the sense of identity of the Dolgan people themselves, or to what extent it was the Russian ethnographers and politicians who created it. Whatever the answer to this question, it does not change anything with respect to the genuineness of their sense of unity today. After all, consolidation may be a matter of a long shared history as much as it may be a conscious decision. The above discussion is only meant to point out the complexity of factors that play a role in such processes.

To give an overview of the diverging opinions on the identity of the Dolgan, a summary of the authors, the clan names as used in the original source, and the associated languages is given in Table 2.3.

¹⁷ "Таким образом, мы относим к долганам все современное якутоязычное население Таймырского национального округа" (Dolgikh 1963: 99, translation mine).

Table 2.3. Different interpretations of 'Dolgan' over time

<i>Author</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Language</i>
Krivoshapkin	1865	Tungus?	Tungus
Castrén	1860	Sakha tribes, identity mixed with Tungus	Sakha
Middendorff	1875	Sakha tribes, identity mixed with Tungus	Sakha
Popov	1931	4 Tungus clans: Dolgan, Edyan, Karanto, Dongot	Sakha dialect with many Evenk words
Dolgikh	1929	Yakut of the tundra	
Dolgikh	1935	Yakutised Evenks	
Dolgikh	1963	Mix of 9 ethnic groups: Dolgan, Dongot, Edyan, Karanto, Yakut, Tundra Yakut, Tundra Peasants, Evenks, Enets	Sakha dialect
Ubryatova	1985	see Dolgikh 1963	Dolgan
Ziker	1998	Mix of Yakut and Tungus, Tundra Peasant, Samoyed individuals	Creole with Sakha grammar and Evenki lexicon
Anderson	2000	Mix of Sakha, Evenks, Tundra Peasants, Nganasan, Enets	Dolgan

2.5 LANGUAGE

As much as the status of the Dolgan people's nationality has been a matter of debate, so has been the status of their language. At present it is fully recognised that the Dolgans have their own official language called Dolgan. They have their own spelling system¹⁸, an emerging written literature, educational material, a page in the Taimyr newspaper and a radio programme. However, this recognition of Dolgan as a separate language took place only in the 1970s. Before addressing this issue in more detail, a brief summary is provided regarding the language situation on the Taimyr Peninsula over time.

¹⁸ Dolgan orthography was developed in the 1970's by A.A Barbolina.

2.5.1 LANGUAGES ON THE TAIMYR

As was mentioned in Section 2.3.1, the earliest inhabitants of the Taimyr Peninsula were probably related to the Chukchi or the Yukaghir people, and so most likely spoke languages that were not related to any of the large language families present in Siberia today (i.e. Indo-European, Tungusic, Turkic, Mongolic, Uralic). The languages spoken by these earliest inhabitants are sometimes subsumed under the name Paleosiberian, but this category is as incoherent as it is controversial (Comrie 1981: 10). From the 2nd century CE onwards, waves of Samoyedic populations moved into the area from the west, later followed by Tungusic clans, presumably with their corresponding Samoyedic and Tungusic languages. From the 9th century onwards, when the influx of Samoyedic people intensified this group spread even further. Thus by the time a new migration wave of Turkic and Tungusic people started moving northwestwards from the Lena and Vilyuy Rivers in the second half of the 17th century, the dominant languages on the Taimyr Peninsula were primarily Samoyedic (i.e. Nganasan, Nenets, Enets) and Tungusic (Evenki). Although Russian fur hunters and tax collectors were also present on the Taimyr at that time, until the 20th century their linguistic influence was insignificant, since most of them did not live there permanently, and they were hugely outnumbered by the indigenous populations (Stern 2009: 388).

With the influx of Turkic-speaking people the balance of languages changed once again, and Sakha became dominant in the region. For this time period, the ancestor language of Dolgan, which I will refer to as Sakha/Dolgan, is often characterised as lingua franca, and as a shortcut I will adopt this term as well. However, it needs to be kept in mind that this ancestor of the Dolgan language was more than just a means for interethnic communication. People who joined the open community along the Khatanga Trading Way used lifestyle as well as language as markers of membership in the newly developing social entity, which later identified as Dolgan. This may also explain why Sakha was adopted in domestic spheres by people of different ethnic backgrounds, eventually leading to language shift, rather than remaining confined to trading situations.

This idea is supported by the fact that besides Sakha/Dolgan, there was another language of intergroup communication, called Taimyr Pidgin. In contrast to Sakha/Dolgan, this language *did* remain restricted to trading situations and was never adopted as a first language. Taimyr Pidgin is a Russian-based pidgin heavily influenced by Sakha, which developed from the 18th century onwards, and in

which the ancestors of the present Dolgans are assumed to have played an important role (Stern 2005: 291). According to Stern it was used as a communication system parallel to the standard variety of Russian.

...up to the 20th century two clearly identifiable varieties of Russian were in use on Taimyr, the first being an ingroup variety of the bi- or trilingual group of the Zatundra peasants within the larger community of semi-sedentary newcomers (i.e. the Dolgans), and the second being a pidgin as outgroup variety, which was mainly used to enable communication across the major social divide of the peninsula, namely between the self-segregating Nganasans and the ethnically heterogeneous population of the Chatangskij trakt (i.e. Khatanga Trading Way, E.S.). (Stern 2009: 392)

Taimyr Pidgin was mainly used for communication between the traders along the Khatanga Way and the more seclusive groups of Nganasan people who did not participate in the new community, but only visited the settlements for barter (Stern 2009: 391-392). Now if Sakha/Dolgan only served the purpose of interethnic communication, it is hard to understand why it was not used in the interaction with the Nganasan as well. The identificational value of Sakha/Dolgan with the community along the Trading Way and its function to flag group membership provides an explanation. Nowadays nearly everybody has native command of Russian, and the pidgin is spoken only by a few, mainly Nganasan, individuals older than 75. In the further discussion Taimyr Pidgin will not be treated in detail due to the marginal role it seems to have played in the development of the Dolgan community. However, the fact that Taimyr Pidgin was promoted mainly by the ancestors of the peoples who call themselves Dolgan today (including the Russian Tundra Peasants), shows that Russian-Sakha bilingualism has existed from the early stages of contact with the Russians. This may have had its repercussions not only on the shape of Taimyr Pidgin Russian, but also on the development of Dolgan itself.

Summarising one could say that along with the indigenous Siberian languages and Russian, two lingua francas of quite a different nature were spoken on the Taimyr. One of them served merely the practical purpose of intergroup communication (Taimyr Pidgin), whereas the other (Dolgan/Sakha) had the additional identificational function of binding people together in a new socio-economic community.

The exact motivations for why Sakha/Dolgan occupied this role and not for example, Evenki, remain hazy due to the lack of socio-historical information from that time. However, it is plausible that the relatively large number of Sakha/Dolgan speakers in combination with their alleged prestigious status facilitated the adoption of Sakha/Dolgan as a lingua franca. It is interesting to note that during the 17th and 18th centuries the Sakha were expanding not only northwards into the Taimyr, but from the Lena River they spread in all directions, and in many cases their language came to dominate in the new area too (Stern 2009: 391).

Thus, just as the Khatanga Trading Way was an accelerator for the spread of goods and people, the environment of trade, interethnic contacts and intermarriage facilitated the spread and establishment of Sakha/Dolgan in this socio-economic environment. With the increase in interethnic marriages it is plausible that those people who permanently occupied this region (i.e. Sakha, Tungus and Tundra Peasants) began to use the lingua franca in private spheres as well, leading eventually to language shift by the non-Sakha groups. This resulted in a variety of Sakha that displays influences from Evenki and Russian, and which nowadays is called Dolgan.

2.5.2 DOLGAN: A DIALECT OR A LANGUAGE?

Over the past three centuries, characterisations of the language variety spoken by the Dolgan have varied from ‘Tungusic’ (Krivoshapkin (1865) in Middendorff 1875) to a dialect of Sakha (e.g. Middendorff 1875, Castrén 1856) and from a ‘Sakha based creole’ (Ziker 1998: 102) to ‘the Dolgan language’ (Ubryatova 1985, Stachowski 1993, Artemyev 2001). This discussion is partly based on linguistic criteria, and partly on the same political and ideological changes that shaped the Dolgan nationality. Even today scholars feel the need to take an explicit stand on the question whether Dolgan is a dialect of Sakha or whether it is a separate language (Stachowski 1993, Artemyev 2001), which indicates that the discussion is still vivid in people’s minds and that the conclusion is not self-evident. The contemporary view is that on the basis of linguistic criteria (e.g. mutual intelligibility), Dolgan may well be considered a dialect of Sakha, but as soon as socio-cultural factors are taken into account, it is clearly a separate language.

From the point of view of language contact studies the classification of Dolgan as a language or a dialect is largely irrelevant. After all, the label of a particular variety as ‘language’ or ‘dialect’ does not influence the nature of contact-induced changes or their significance for a people’s (pre)history. However, a brief discussion of the different lines of thought is necessary as part of the Dolgan’s complex history, as it illustrates how arbitrary and artificial the boundaries are along the continuum of languages and dialects.

Turning a blind eye to the exact details of time and place for the moment, there is common agreement that the ancestors of the present day Dolgans are predominantly Tungus and Sakha groups who migrated northwest from the Lena and Vilyuy Rivers. We have no documented information regarding the languages these individual groups spoke, but it would be intuitive to assume that most of the Tungus clans spoke Tungusic languages (Evenki or Even) and the Turkic groups spoke Sakha. However, as was argued in Sections 1.1 and 2.1, the Dolgan provide evidence that a correspondence between clan and language does not always hold since they have a Tungusic name, but speak a Turkic language. This inconsistency was explained through a scenario of language shift, whereby the Tungusic Dolgan clan adopted the Sakha language, which then spread over a larger area and became the lingua franca for interethnic communication. Supporting evidence for this hypothesis was taken from Ubryatova’s reference to the fact that in the 17th century the Sakha and Tungus groups shared a single headman, which may have stimulated Tungusic-Turkic bilingualism in the Tungusic groups, and potentially language shift (see Sections 2.3.2.2 and 2.4.1).

Additional confirmation for an increasingly dominant position of the Sakha and their language is provided by Dolgikh. He notes that by the end of the 17th century in the Olenek region, which used to be occupied by Tungusic clans, 60% of the population had become Sakha (Dolgikh 1963: 114). Dolgikh does not exclude the possibility that the Tungus of this area may already have been bilingual at the time, and he is quite confident that some of them would become so later, in particular the members of the Tungusic Edyan clan, who inhabited this area and are a recurrent component in the description of the Dolgan people in all historical documentation. Dolgikh even goes as far as proposing that the Edyan may have introduced the Dolgan dialect of Sakha to the Taimyr Peninsula (*ibid*: 114).

Despite these indirect historical and demographic facts, conclusions about the languages people spoke at the time remain speculative. The first time explicit mention was made of the language of the Dolgan people, was during the

expeditions of Castrén and Middendorff in 1845-1849 and 1845, respectively. As mentioned above, Middendorff describes their language as ‘pure Yakut’ and refutes earlier identifications of it as Tungus (Krivoshapkin 1865). With the exception of Krivoshapkin, there has been consensus that Dolgan is a Turkic language with certain Tungusic influences, and that it shows a high degree of similarity with Sakha. However, the degree to which either the similarities or the differences with Sakha are highlighted differs strikingly, as can be seen from the range of definitions from ‘a Sakha dialect’ (Middendorff 1875), to ‘a Sakha based creole’ (Ziker 1998) or ‘a separate language on purely linguistic grounds’ (Ubryatova 1985).

It is nothing new that the classification of language varieties as languages and dialects is in fact a continuum (e.g. Ross 2003: 177) and that linguistic criteria such as mutual intelligibility are not necessarily a reliable measure to make this distinction. There are many examples where mutually intelligible language varieties have been granted the status of ‘language’ (e.g. Serbian and Croatian), while very different varieties are considered dialects (e.g. varieties of Chinese and of Khanty). In such cases, the degree of difference or similarity accorded to the varieties seems to be based on political motivations rather than on inherent linguistic properties. After all, the recognition of an official emblematic language fosters a sense of unity, which is important for the establishment of any political unit. Therefore linguistic differences within political boundaries are often glossed over, whereas they tend to be highlighted across political boundaries to underline ‘foreignness’ of the people on the other side of the fence. This point of view is well summarised in Weinreich’s famous quote that “a language is a dialect with an army and a navy”¹⁹ (Weinreich (1945: 13).

Although the Dolgans do not have their own army and navy, the oscillation of the status of their language variety between ‘dialect’ and ‘language’ over time is a good example of the fluid boundary between those two categories, and of the important role politics play in this classification. After the establishment of the Taimyr National Region in 1930, it was important to fuel the growing, partly externally imposed, sense of unity among the people who belonged to this unit. Such processes are speeded up when outsiders, especially scientists, come to study the community in question and ‘objectively’ confirm the commonalities within, and differences across, the groups. This applies to ethnic identity as it does to

¹⁹ Original: אַ שפּראַך איז דיאַלעקט אַן אַרמיי און אַ נאַװי [A shprakh iz a dialekt mit an armey un flot] (Weinreich 1945: 13).

language, and in the case of the Dolgans we see it happening in both domains. What Dolgikh did for the recognition and in a certain sense creation of the Dolgans as a nationality, Ubryatova did in the domain of language. Coincidentally (or maybe not quite), her 'Language of the Norilsk Dolgans'²⁰, which is the first grammar of the Dolgan language, was published only three years after Dolgikh's 'The origin of the Dolgans'. Besides providing a grammatical description of the language, Ubryatova pleads in her introduction for the recognition of Dolgan as a separate language on purely linguistic grounds. She argues that pervasive differences exist between Dolgan and Sakha in the domains of "phonetics, morphology and in particular in the lexicon" (Ubryatova 1985: 17), which according to her could only have formed during a long period of isolated development separate from Sakha, and which suffices to grant it language status on an exclusively linguistic basis.

As alluded to above, the most recent linguistic opinions are critical of this argumentation. In his introduction to 'The Dolgan language', Artemyev (2001) stresses the importance of making a distinction between the linguistic criteria and the socio-cultural factors that play a role in the division between dialects and languages, and he finds the linguistic criteria adduced by Ubryatova unconvincing. However, the historical and socio-cultural differences with Sakha are sufficient to classify Dolgan as a separate language (Artemyev 2001: 6), which is supported by Stachowski (1993: 16), when he says that the language-or-dialect-issue is mainly dependent on the "sense of unity of the separate language communities"²¹.

2.6 GENETIC COMPOSITION OF THE DOLGAN

2.6.1 BASIC CONCEPTS

While historical and ethnographic information is essential to understand the history, as well as the present state, of a people, the divergent accounts show that it is not always clear how much credibility should be given to the classification of populations on the basis of archival data alone. Often information on ethnic affiliation was not collected by ethnographers, but by tax collectors whose main concern was of course tax and tribute and not to provide an accurate account of

²⁰ язык норильских долган.

²¹ "Zusammenhoerigkeitsbewusstsein der einzelnen Sprachgemeinschaften" (Stachowski 1993: 16).

the peoples' history. And even if it was collected by ethnographers, we have seen that their goal was not always unambiguous: were their ethnographic accounts intended to describe reality, or to shape reality to fit their politically inspired ethnic classification? Thus, these accounts are not sufficient to disentangle the complex composition of the Dolgan people.

The only way to get a more reliable picture of the ethnic origins of the Dolgans and thus of their prehistory, is by looking at their genetic composition as well. The different proportions of genetic markers, or haplogroups, within the population can give insights into patterns of admixture and migration of the various populations that have resulted in the ethnolinguistic group that carries the name 'Dolgan' today. This section gives an overview of the results of this enterprise, the full account of which is forthcoming (Whitten et al. in preparation).

Genetic markers can be used to study the overall history of populations. Two specific parts of the genome highlight the maternal and the paternal prehistory. For the investigation of the maternal history of a population, it is common to use analysis of the mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA)²². MtDNA is genetic material that is only transmitted in the maternal line and does not, in contrast to autosomal DNA, undergo recombination²³, making it a reliable way to reconstruct genealogies of mutations for the mtDNA (Pakendorf 2007: 330). The paternal history of a population can be studied with the help of analyses of the Y-chromosome, which is only passed on from fathers to their sons. Like mtDNA, most of the Y-chromosome does not undergo recombination and can therefore also be used to trace particular genetic mutations back through time.

Now how can this information be used to study admixture and migration patterns of populations? Important concepts here are the notions of haplogroup

²² A mitochondrion (pl. mitochondria) is a specialised unit in a cell that is involved in a range of processes, an important one being the provision of energy to the cell.

²³ Recombination is a process that occurs during the production of gametes, or reproductive cells. Instead of producing an identical copy of the maternal and a copy of the paternal chromosome, recombination describes the event where part of the maternal chromosome fuses with part of the paternal chromosome during the production of gametes, due to physical overlap of the two chromosomes prior to the cell splitting. In other words, parts of the homologous chromosomes are 'recombined'. This kind of cell division results in a new germ cell, parts of which come from the mother and parts of which from the father, rather than coming entirely from one parent. While the good thing is that this leads to a large genetic variation in offspring, the randomness of this recombination makes these chromosomes unsuitable for the determination of a common ancestor.

and haplotype. Haplogroups are defined by mutations on the Y-chromosome and the mtDNA that are assumed to occur only once in human history, and individuals who share the same mutation are said to belong to the same haplogroup. This type of mutation is called a SNP mutation, which is short for single nucleotide polymorphism (Rubisz 2007)²⁴. Since the Y-chromosome and the mtDNA do not recombine, it is possible to reconstruct phylogenetic trees for these molecules and trace them back in time and space. This is useful because people who share a SNP (and thus belong to the same haplogroup) must share a common ancestor at some time in prehistory. To a certain extent, these SNPs bear similarity to the phenomenon of ‘shared innovations’ in historical linguistics, which are used in a similar way to identify a ‘common ancestor’ of two languages, and thus linguistic relatedness (Pakendorf 2007: 332). Since haplogroups occur in groups of related individuals, particular haplogroups have become associated with groups of populations and are conceived of as a genetic marker of these groups. However, haplogroups do not unambiguously correlate with one ethnic group. They frequently occur in more than one population, in which case the SNP mutations alone are not sufficient to determine the origin of the haplogroup.

In many cases this problem can be solved by looking at haplotypes as well (see below for a definition). For this purpose, longer stretches of DNA are compared, rather than just single SNP mutations. This strategy also enables us to uncover more fine-grained variation between individuals that developed after the SNP arose. For haplotype analysis stretches of the DNA are typed that (in contrast to SNPs) change quickly and are highly variable from individual to individual. For the mtDNA these stretches traditionally correspond to the nucleotide composition of a DNA fragment that is called the hypervariable region (or HVR), but nowadays the entire mtDNA genome can be sequenced for this purpose (see Whitten et al. in preparation). For the Y-chromosome the stretches typically correspond to little chunks of DNA that vary in their copy number (or repeats) and that are called short tandem repeats (or STRs). The set of states for an individual at a given number of loci on the mtDNA or the Y-chromosome is called a haplotype. For the mtDNA the set of states is defined as a particular *sequence of base pairs* at a certain locus on the chromosome; for the Y-chromosome it is defined by the *number of repetitions* of base pair sequences. To illustrate how a difference in STRs on the Y-

²⁴ In fact, in addition to SNP mutations, insertions or deletions of DNA can also define haplogroups. The overarching name for haplogroup-defining mutations is UEP (Unique Event Polymorphism). However, for the purpose of this thesis only SNP mutations are of relevance.

chromosome between two individuals can be determined: individual A has five repeats of the base pair sequence AACT on locus P, and three repeats of sequence TGGC on locus Q. Individual B may have the same number of repeats of AACT and TGGC on these loci on the Y-chromosome, in which case they are said to share the same haplotype²⁵. However, individual B may also differ from individual A and have, for instance, only four repeats of AACT on locus P (instead of five in individual A) and three repeats of TGGC on locus Q (as has individual A). The difference in repeats (which is only one for the current example) defines the genetic distance between the two individuals for this particular locus on the chromosome. Identical base pair sequences at the loci of interest, and thus a shared haplotype, in two individuals is evidence of relatively recent shared ancestry: since haplotypes are established through comparison of quickly mutating regions on the DNA, it is unlikely that they remain unchanged for many generations. On the other hand, large differences in haplotypes within a haplogroup may point to very ancient common ancestry. Hence, haplotype analysis can help identify whether two individuals belong to the same haplogroup through inheritance from a prehistoric common ancestor (in which case haplotypes are unlikely to be shared) or through more recent admixture (in which case they can be shared). In summary, we can say that shared haplogroups, defined by shared SNPs, signify a common ancestor very far back in history, whereas additional shared haplotypes, defined by similarities of base pair sequences (on HVR loci) or number of repeats (on HVR or STR loci), can disambiguate the origin of the haplogroup and distinguish between very ancient and more recent shared ancestry.

Since certain shared mutations, and thus haplogroups, have become associated with groups of populations they can be used to set up hypotheses about possible patterns of inheritance or population admixture in the past. However, the difference between these two scenarios is not easy to establish. Before turning to the results of the mtDNA and Y-chromosome analysis of the Dolgans, it might be useful to briefly mention more generally some genetic outcomes and their associated interpretations.

For the mtDNA as well as the Y-chromosome, a low diversity of haplogroups in a population can be indicative of small isolated populations with endogamy (and resulting genetic drift), while high diversity can be indicative of large

²⁵ In reality, one would include at least five loci, but since this example only aims at an explanation of the principle, only two loci are compared for the sake of clarity.

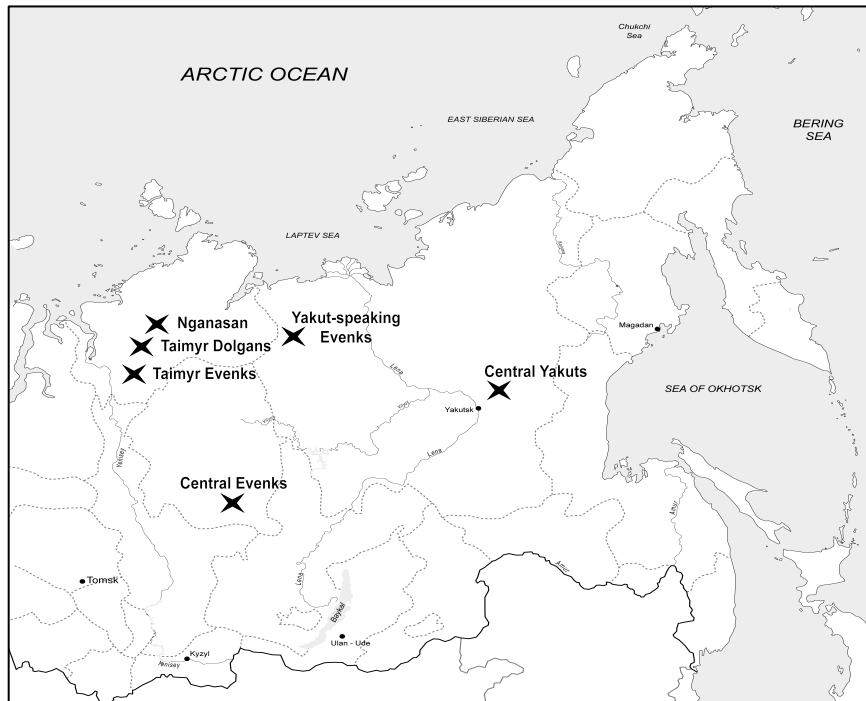
population sizes and/or admixture. In other words, a low diversity of mtDNA haplogroups can be the result of migration in a scenario where a small proportion of women migrate to a new location and spread only this genetic information in the new community, or of endogamy, when genes are exchanged within the same ethnic group. Admixture with other populations may over time lead to a higher haplogroup diversity. Close genetic distances between mtDNA sequences can be the result of either common ancestry or of admixture, and it is impossible to distinguish between these two scenarios on the basis of mtDNA analysis alone. With respect to the Y-chromosome it is worth noting that a large genetic difference between populations is associated with patrilocality, i.e. a social structure where after marriage the married couple stays in the same location as the husband's parents. This implies that the men stay in the same community, while the women move to different locations, leading to mixing of the mtDNA gene pools, but separation of the Y-chromosomes.

2.6.2. MTDNA ANALYSIS

Analysis of complete mtDNA genome sequences shows that the Dolgan population is, in the maternal line, very closely related to a population that in this study is identified as Yakut-speaking Evenks as well as to the Taimyr Evenks (Whitten et al. in preparation). In this section I will refer to the populations as they are labeled in the genetic study, whereby it is important to keep in mind that the label Yakut corresponds to what I normally call Sakha. The first group, the Yakut-speaking Evenks, lives in the Olenek area and speak, as the name suggests, Yakut (or Sakha). However, they self-identify as Evenks, despite the fact that they do not speak the Evenki language. The second population, the Taimyr Evenks, are a group of Evenks who live on the Taimyr Peninsula. An overview of the populations that are compared in the study, their geographical location and their labels is provided in Map 4.

An analysis of shared mtDNA haplotypes across 21 Siberian populations, including Mongolic, Turkic, Samoyedic, Tungusic and Yukaghir populations, reveals that the highest percentage of shared haplotypes occurs between the Dolgan, the Yakut-speaking Evenks and the Taimyr Evenks, indicating that the genetic distance along the maternal line between these groups is very small. It needs to be mentioned that the mtDNA haplotypes are widely shared across

Siberian populations, which may point to a shared common ancestral gene pool, or it may reflect a historical scenario in which the women moved widely across Siberia, or a combination of both. Thus the mere fact that the Dolgans show genetic similarity with other ethnic groups is not particularly special. However, what is unique is the high percentage of shared haplotypes between the Dolgans, the Yakut-speaking Evenks and the Taimyr Evenks, when compared other ethnic groups in Siberia.



Map 4: Peoples and locations where genetic samples were collected

More precisely, the Dolgan share 60% of exact mtDNA sequences with the Yakut-speaking Evenks from Olenek and about 48% with the Taimyr Evenks. The Taimyr Evenks and the Yakut-speaking Evenks share in turn about 50% of exact mtDNA sequences with each other. Even between subpopulations, such as for example the Central Yakuts and the northeastern Yakuts, the percentage of shared haplotypes is not as high (about 38%) as between the Dolgan and their geographically adjacent, but ethnolinguistically different, groups. Thus, this picture suggests that there has been contact in the maternal line between Dolgans,

Yakut-speaking Evenks and Taimyr Evenks and that women married into communities that were ethnolinguistically different from their own. As may be remembered from Section 2.3.2.3, this is fully commensurable with the table of marriages that was provided by Dolgikh.

2.6.3. Y-CHROMOSOME ANALYSIS

While in the mtDNA the Siberian populations share a lot of their genetic material, the Y-chromosome shows more differentiation across populations. As mentioned above, this could be indicative of patrilocality, which matches the ethnographic descriptions of marriage patterns of both Turkic and Tungusic populations.

Analysis of the Y-chromosome in a number of Siberian populations shows that certain haplogroups, referred to arbitrarily by letters of the alphabet, are strongly represented within certain ethnic groups. The codes of some haplogroups found in the Taimyr populations, and the ethnic group with which they are associated are shown in Table 2.4.

Table 2.4: Haplogroups and their associated populations

HAPLOGROUP	ETHNIC GROUP
C	Northern Tungusic (Evenk, Even), Mongolic
N2	Samoyedic, Tungusic
N3	Yakut, but also Uralic and other northern Eurasian populations
R	European

As can be seen from the table, haplogroup C is associated with northern Tungusic populations, N3 is a marker of Yakut as well as of Buryats and Uralic populations all the way to the Finns. Despite this ambiguity, N3 has been identified particularly as a Yakut marker, since 94% of the Yakut men carry it in their genome (Pakendorf et al. 2006). Moreover, haplotype identification through STR analysis has shown that the STR haplotypes in these Yakut men show a high degree of similarity, so we can confidently say that within the men that were sampled for this study, haplogroup N3 is a marker of shared Yakut ancestry. N2 is generally found in high frequency in Northern Samoyedic populations (44.9% in Forest Nenets, 74.6% in Tundra Nenets, 92.1% in Nganasan, 77.8% in Enets, but here the sample size is only

9; Karafet et al. 2002) as well as Tungusic populations (in addition to the numbers in the table below, the Central Evenks (from Topolnoe) have 37.5% (Pakendorf et al. 2007)). Finally, haplogroup R is associated with Europeans. Now the representation of those haplogroups within a selection of the Taimyr populations and relevant groups for comparison looks as follows:

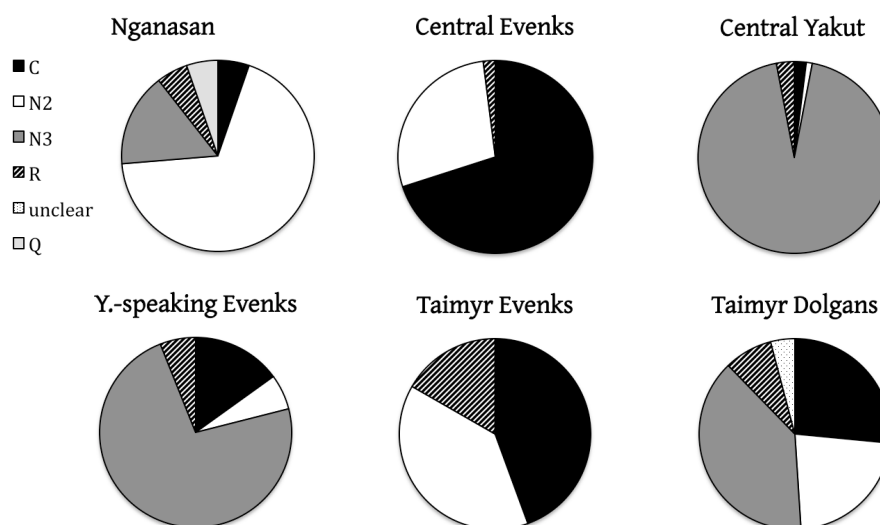


Figure 2.1: Complements of Y-chromosomal haplogroups in north Siberian populations

As can be seen from figure 2.1 in most populations one haplogroup is dominant: in the Nganasans it is N2, in the Central Evenks it is C, and in the Central Yakuts and the Yakut-speaking Evenks it is the Yakut marker N3. Compared to this picture, the Taimyr Evenks and in particular the Dolgans demonstrate a more diverse profile. In the Taimyr Evenks haplogroups C and N2 are present in almost equal proportions, and in the Taimyr Dolgans all three markers (C, N2 and N3) are present in comparable frequency, none of them being evidently dominant. On the basis of haplogroup analysis, it looks like the Dolgans share a common ancestor with the Yakut (N3), the Tungus (C), Samoyeds/Tungus (N2) and Europeans (R). However, as was mentioned earlier, some of the haplogroups are not unequivocal with respect to the ethnic group they are associated with, and in order to be sure about the origins of their haplogroup it is necessary to undertake haplotype analysis as well. For N3, STR haplotype analysis shows that this haplogroup in the Dolgans is shared with the Yakut population, as expected on the basis of historical

sources. R, which is a haplogroup found in European populations, turns out to be identical to Y-chromosome haplotypes of Russian men, which is evidence of recent geneflow from Russians into the Dolgan population. For N2, which can be associated with Samoyedic as well as with Tungusic populations, haplotype analysis was not able to disambiguate between these two possibilities. The exact haplotypes found in the Dolgans were shared with Evenks and Samoyedic individuals in approximately equal proportions. Thus, the proportion of haplogroup N2 in the Dolgan population can either point to a Samoyedic or a Tungusic common ancestor. In the first case this would result in a diverse profile of Turkic, Tungusic and Samoyedic haplogroups with a slight dominance of the Yakut marker (approximately 40%), However, the second scenario would support a distribution in which Tungusic haplogroups clearly dominate the picture, even more than the Turkic haplogroups N3, despite the fact that they speak a Turkic language. At this point it is worth mentioning that this picture would be strikingly similar to the ethnic composition suggested by Dolgikh in 1963, who based his picture purely on archival materials. The striking similarity between the two charts as they would look if haplogroup N2 is had Tungusic origin is given in figure 2.2.

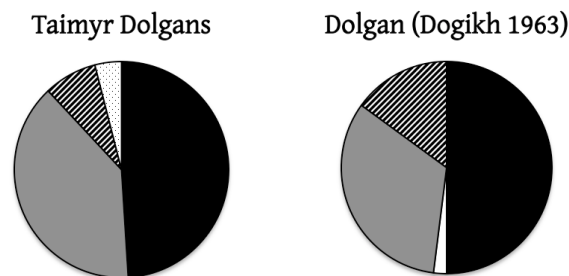


Figure 2.2 Ethnic composition of the Dolgans based on Y-chromosomal haplogroup analysis (L) and on registered marriages (R).

While earlier published data on the Dolgan Y-chromosome display a different distribution of haplogroups, in particular with respect to the frequency of haplogroups associated with European (Russian) ancestry, the dominance of Tungusic haplogroups is confirmed by Karafet et al. (2002). They found the following haplogroup frequencies for the Dolgan population: 37% of the sampled individuals belonged to haplogroup C (typically associated with Tungusic population), 12% to N2 (associated with Tungusic or Samoyedic groups), 22% to N3

(associated with Yakut), and 19% to R and I (associated with European populations). For an easier comparison these proportions are represented in Figure 2.3:

Dolgan (Karafet 2002)

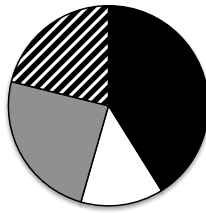


Figure 2.3: Y-chromosomal haplogroups in the Dolgans according to Karafet et al. (2002)

Regardless of the differences, both analyses show a high frequency of the haplogroup associated with Tungusic (Evenk) populations, which reflects that Evenk males must have moved into the Turkic community. Whether these were larger groups of Evenks who moved into the Dolgan community and learned their language, but otherwise remained relatively independent of the Dolgan/Sakha people, or whether the relocation was accompanied by intense intermarriage with individuals from other ethnic backgrounds is impossible to tell from these data. The only fact we can establish is that both mtDNA analyses as well as Y-chromosome analyses give evidence of close contact between the Dolgan/Sakha and Tungusic populations. However, on the basis of Dolgikh's marriage table we can assume that there was a significant amount of interethnic marriage as well.

2.6.4. INTERPRETATION

Both mtDNA and Y-chromosome analyses show close contact between Turkic and Tungusic populations in northern Siberia. What can this information tell us about admixture and patterns of migration, and how does it affect the interpretation of language data?

The mtDNA analysis has shown that the Dolgans, the Yakut-speaking Evenks and the Taimyr Evenks share a high proportion of haplotypes, which means that women were exchanged between these groups. From a genetic point of view, these groups can even be conceived of as a single population, as is indicated by the so-

called F_{st} value. In genetic analysis, the F_{st} value determines genetic distance between populations and is used as a measure of population differentiation. If this value is zero or non-significant, the difference between the populations is so small that it can be conceived of as one unit. For the Dolgans, the Yakut-speaking Evenks and the Taimyr Evenks, the genetic difference was shown to be non-significant (see Whitten et al. in preparation). However, despite the fact that they live in geographically adjacent areas and have for a large part a similar lifestyle, the three groups do not self-identify as one population, and they refer to themselves by different ethnonyms. In addition, there is a linguistic dividing line within the group: while the Dolgans and the Yakut-speaking Evenks speak a Turkic language (Dolgan and Sakha, respectively), the Taimyr Evenks speak a Tungusic language (Evenki). This means that part of the population of Dolgan, Yakut-speaking Evenks and Taimyr Evenks (or at least the women who married into other groups) must have adopted a different language at some time in the past. However, purely from the genetic data nothing can be inferred with respect to the extent to which this happened or about the direction of such a possible shift. On the basis of the mtDNA alone, all three groups could have been Turkic-speaking and the Taimyr Evenks could have shifted to the Tungusic Evenki language. Alternatively they may have been all Tungusic-speaking groups, of which the Dolgans and the Yakut-speaking Evenks adopted the Turkic languages Sakha and Dolgan, and finally, they may have been Turkic-speaking and Tungusic-speaking groups who intermarried.

In the paternal line we have seen that almost all investigated populations expose a certain diversity in haplogroups, but that in each population one of the haplogroups C, N2 or N3 is represented most prominently. An exception to this pattern is the Dolgan population, which shows comparable frequencies of haplogroups C, N2 and N3, indicating that a genetic contribution from Samoyedic/Tungusic, Tungusic and Turkic males is present in the population in almost equal proportions. In theory this could point to a very ancient ancestor that was common to all three populations. However, the haplotype sharing with the Sakha for haplogroup N3, and with the Evenks for haplogroup C that was demonstrated through STR analysis shows that more recent admixture is a more plausible explanation for this diversity. The origin of haplogroup N2, which is associated with Tungusic and Samoyedic populations, could not be determined with certainty.

Of course intermarriage and migration are not the only ways for Y-chromosomal genes to enter a population. It could also happen through events of

rape or one-time physical contact between male and female individuals, but the high extent to which the different haplogroups are found in the Dolgan population makes this scenario highly implausible as a primary explanation. Since the Turkic, as well as the Tungusic, populations are patrilocal, intense marriage of males from different ethnic backgrounds into the community is also unlikely to have happened.

A more plausible explanation for the diversity in haplogroups among the Dolgans is that groups of males from various ethnic backgrounds, and in particular Evenks, moved to the area where the present-day Dolgans live and became part of the new community by adopting a new lifestyle of trading along with reindeer herding and adopting the Sakha/Dolgan language. Whether these males then intermarried with women from other ethnic groups, or whether they rather interacted more with females who came with them cannot be determined on the basis of these data. However, Dolgikh's marriage table shows that interethnic marriages were common and if it is true that the newcomers adopted a new language, it is unlikely that they only interacted with their own people. If they did so, there would have been no need to adopt a different language in the first place, and they probably would not have become integrated completely into the new community.

It also remains unclear on the basis of these data which populations moved into which community, in other words, the direction of admixture. Technically, the distribution of Y-chromosomal haplogroups in the Dolgans could be a reflection of Turkic men moving into Tungusic groups, or vice versa. The fact that the Dolgan speak a Turkic language today may point to Turkic as the dominant language at the time when other populations came into the community, and that the newcomers therefore adopted Sakha/Dolgan. While this interpretation is the most plausible on the basis of historical records, the genetic data alone do not give support of one direction over the other. The historical and ethnographic data that were presented above, in combination with the analysis of contact-induced changes in the language that is still to come, is intended to help find answers to this question.

2.7. SUMMARY

Throughout history we have seen that there has been little consensus on the ethnic composition, moment of formation, or language of the Dolgan people. However, a review of the historical, ethnographical and genetic information conspires towards recognition of the view that the Dolgans are of multiethnic origin, with the main components being Tungus (Evenki), Turkic (Sakha) and Russian. For different reasons these groups moved to the southern Taimyr in the second half of the 17th and beginning of the 18th centuries. Here, initial ethnic boundaries based on descent gradually faded, and they were exchanged and complemented by identity formation on the basis of shared activities (trade), language and ecological zone.

Contact between Turkic and Tungusic groups probably existed as early as the 17th century in the area of the Lena and Vilyuy rivers, but the formation of the Dolgans as a separate ethno-linguistic group took place later. While this process of 'Dolganisation' may have started in the 18th century, their official establishment as a separate ethnic group only took place in the 20th century, under the influence of Russian politicians and state ethnographers, who had no space in their ideological framework for the fluid ethnic boundaries and identity continua that seem to have been present amongst these groups. Most likely, the foundation for today's Dolgan community was formed in the second half of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th centuries when Sakha and Tungusic groups (including the one named Dolgan) moved from the Vilyuy and Lena rivers to the southern Taimyr. Although we have no records of the languages they spoke, it is possible that even back then there was some Tungusic-Turkic bilingualism among the ancestors of the Dolgans, as is suggested by the fact that Tungusic people were ruled by a Sakha headman. This could have involved incipient bilingualism in Sakha in the Tungusic Evenks.

The mutual adaptation of people from different genetic and geographic origins continued after their arrival on the Taimyr in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. The different ethnic groups that engaged in the life of the Khatanga Trading Way adopted trade alongside their traditional activities such as reindeer herding, hunting, and fishing, and grew closer to each other genetically, culturally and linguistically. It will be remembered that the early 19th century was the time of the calamitous attempt to populate the Taimyr, when many Russian peasants arrived in the area around the Khatanga Trading Way and had to adopt the native way of life in order to survive. Thus, although different ethnic groups had arrived

for different reasons, they shared one thing: they were all newcomers to the southern Taimyr, whether Vilyuy Evenk, Lena Sakha or Russian peasant. They were all in a phase of adaptation to a new way of life in a new geographic environment. The dominance of recent immigrants and the absence of any strongly established groups (except the Nganasan who lived further north and barely engaged in the life around the Trading Way) may have made the fading of existing ethnic boundaries a natural phenomenon. Finding a new common unity and identity may have been more essential in the struggle for survival in new inhospitable lands than restricting oneself to the small group of relatives and retaining one's old identity. In this context it also seems natural that this new common identity was based more on shared occupation, ecological zone and language than on descent (Anderson 2000: 91-96). This process of dissolution of ethnic boundaries intensified over the next century or so.

Genetic analyses support the historical and ethnographic accounts. They show that there has been admixture of Sakha and Tungusic groups in the maternal as well as in the paternal line, whereby the similarities in the maternal line are so striking that there must have been a significant amount of marriages of women between the ethnic groups. The fact that the Dolgans nowadays speak a Turkic language implies that in one of the two groups language shift must have taken place. Although from the mtDNA alone we cannot tell the direction of the shift, we know from historical records that Sakha became the lingua franca. Therefore we can assume that the Tungusic groups gradually shifted to Turkic Sakha rather than the reverse.

The analyses of the Y-chromosome (i.e. the paternal line) confirms this scenario. The data show that Dolgans are the only group for which the haplogroups C, N2 and N3 are represented in almost equal proportions. Most plausibly, this is indicative of a historical event where men from different ethnic backgrounds moved to the area along the Trading Way, and adopted the lingua franca of the area, Sakha. The question of whether these men on arrival only interacted with people from their own community cannot be answered by the genetic results, but the linguistic and ethnographic data give important clues: the adoption of a new language, in particular a lingua franca, only seems to make sense when there is a significant amount of interethnic communication. Interaction with other ethnic groups is strikingly confirmed by Dolgikh's data on marriage patterns, which show that only 37.5% of marriages took place between members of the same ethnic group.

The next question to ask is how this complex history is reflected in the language of the Dolgan. There is agreement on the close similarity between Dolgan and Sakha, but if the language shift scenario is true, then we would expect some traces of a Tungusic substrate in the Dolgan that is spoken today. Similarly, if the Dolgans themselves have been bilingual in Russian for some time, this may be noticeable in their current speech as well. It is possible to simply compare standard Sakha and Dolgan and note down the differences. However, in order to attribute meaning to the differences, and to make inferences about what they can tell us about Dolgan prehistory, it is necessary to link the findings to a theoretical framework. Therefore the next chapter will provide an overview of the most relevant ideas from language contact theory, bilingualism and language acquisition. Without pretending to be comprehensive, this background knowledge will equip us with the framework we need to formulate hypotheses about: a) what linguistic changes in Dolgan we might expect; and b) how to interpret the attested changes.

