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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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CHAPTER 10 CONCLUDING REMARKS AND FUTURE

OUTLOOK

The research for this thesis was conducted with two primary aims: a) to investigate contact-induced change in Dolgan; and b) to get a better insight into the origins and history of the Dolgan. The first goal was achieved by investigating a selection of linguistic consequences of two different contact situations that have left their vestiges in the current Dolgan language, namely that with Evenki and that with Russian. It was concluded that in both contact settings the observed changes are motivated primarily by the linguistic process of imposition as a result of language shift. However, an important difference between them concerns the direction of the shift and the agents of change. In the contact setting with Evenki there was a shift *towards* the Dolgan language. The Tungusic Evenks, who did not speak a Turkic language, shifted to Dolgan/Sakha and imposed structures from their L1 (Evenki) onto their L2 (Dolgan/Sakha) due to imperfect learning. In contrast, the shift referred to in the contact setting between Russians and Dolgans is a shift *away from* Dolgan, and is initiated by the Dolgan people themselves. The structural changes are the result of a change in linguistic dominance of the Dolgans, who now impose linguistic properties from their dominant language Russian onto Dolgan. While technically the underlying process, as well as the character of the linguistic consequences, may be comparable, there is an obvious social difference: in the contact setting with the Evenks, the shift and the

consequent imposed changes are the result of the increased social dominance of Dolgan, whereas in the second case they instead reflect a decrease.

During the climax of contact between Evenks and Dolgans, which took place between the 18th and 19th centuries along the Khatanga Trading Way, the Dolgan people occupied a socially dominant position in this niche. Over time, their language acquired the function of a *lingua franca* and served as an important instrument of intergroup communication across all ethnic groups that participated in the trade. This in turn produced more and more second language speakers, and may have been an important motivation for other Evenk clans, who were the other main figures in the Taimyr trade, to shift completely to the Dolgan language.

In contrast, the contact situation with the Russians is marked by a decrease in the social significance of Dolgan. The ideological invasion of the Russians during the 20th century, which had serious social, political and cultural repercussions, was paralleled by a linguistic invasion as well. The initial consequence was widespread and relatively balanced bilingualism within the Dolgan speech community, but toward the 1970's the balance of linguistic dominance tipped towards the Russian side. By now the majority of Dolgans is dominant in Russian, and the linguistic consequences of this dominance are felt as structural changes in Dolgan, based on the model of Russian. Thus, within less than a century many Dolgans have become non-dominant speakers, or even L2 speakers, of their traditional language, and now a shift to Russian seems almost irreversible.

However, evidence from other disciplines has led to the insight that in both contact settings an explanation of the linguistic changes in terms of imposition through shift alone does not tell the full story. The 'mismatch' in the Dolgan community between their Tungusic name and their Turkic language stimulates the idea of a shift, either of language or of ethnic identity. The contact-induced structural changes discussed in this thesis, in combination with the high proportion of Tungusic-associated haplogroups in the Dolgan Y-chromosome, provide strong support for the first hypothesis. However, zooming out from the individual changes, this account is not entirely satisfactory. If the Dolgans were exclusively Tungusic clans that adopted the Dolgan/Sakha language, the total amount of traces from their mother tongue is surprisingly limited. While the observed contact-induced changes are informative on their own account, within the overall picture of the Dolgan/Sakha language they constitute only a small part, suggesting that the history of the ancestors of the Dolgans has more than one

storyline. Once again it is the genetic information that proves a useful guide. Besides the impressive proportion of Tungusic-related haplogroups, nearly 40% of the paternal genepool is shared with the Turkic Sakha. The most plausible conclusion to be drawn from this is that the ethnolinguistic group identifying as Dolgans today developed in part from the fusion of Tungusic Evenk clans who shifted to Dolgan/Sakha, and in part from a significant number of Sakha people, who kept their language but shifted ethnic identity. Thus, the continuous presence of L1 Sakha-speaking people in the emerging Dolgan community would even out some of the Evenki influence that went hand in hand with the large number of L2 Sakha speakers. Therefore, recognition of these two sides of the coin, based on a combination of linguistic, genetic and historical information, accounts for the characteristic, but nonetheless relatively limited amount of Tungusic influence in the Dolgan language as it is spoken today.

A comparable conclusion can be drawn regarding the contact between Dolgans and Russians. Imposition through shift is, in this case, the main explanation for the structural variation in Dolgan. However, a careful consideration of recent history, and the social setting in which the current shift is taking place, shows that on an individual level a distinction needs to be made between Dolgan-dominant and Russian-dominant speakers in order to give a complete account of the linguistic processes that underlie the changes. While this division is anything but definite, for the sake of convenience dominance was correlated with age, where the older generation is typically dominant in Dolgan, and the younger generation dominant in Russian. The consequence of this recognition is that the same linguistic outcome (structural change) is explained through multiple motivations; by imposition through shift in the Russian-dominant part of the population, and simultaneously by borrowing in an intense contact situation in the Dolgan-dominant part of the population.

Finally, the genetic information on the Dolgan population was used to conclusively exclude the possibility that these structural changes occurred through imposition by Russians who shifted to Dolgan. In accordance with the historical information on this issue, the limited amount of Russian-related haplogroups in the Dolgan population clearly confirm this idea.

As stated in the introduction, one of the incentives for reopening the investigation into the origins of the Dolgans was the contradictory information in the ethnographic, historical and linguistic sources, and the resulting confusion about the way in which their 'mixed' heritage should be understood. The research

presented here has shown that careful consideration of data from all these sources provides a more detailed and realistic image of the undocumented past. More importantly, it illustrates that a multidisciplinary approach and a synthesis of the outcomes from different research areas can yield new insights, and add meaning to data that seem insignificant or contradictory when considered individually.

While I am convinced that this is true in almost any research discipline, it is particularly apparent in the study of language and even more so of contact-induced change, which is tightly interwoven with other aspects of the human individual, as well as with human society, and thus touches upon fields of study including psychology, cognitive sciences, anthropology and sociology. Since such fields rely heavily on interpretation of ephemeral aspects of human life, genetic information provides a more permanent and objective frame for the interpretation of the linguistic material. Therefore, the combination of insights from the abovementioned fields, and their repercussions on language use, greatly advances our understanding of the contact situation as a whole.

This thesis also provides supporting evidence for the idea that contact-induced change often needs to be explained by multiple motivations. If one wants to do justice to the complexity of a contact situation, it is often not possible to hold on to a binary dichotomy between borrowing or imposition, and it is necessary to recognise that a single linguistic change may be motivated by more than one process of change.

Finally, it needs to be emphasised that this thesis has not only given answers, but it has also generated questions regarding the history and language of the Dolgans, contact-induced change, as well as the further development of theories of language contact. Linguistically, it has exposed the lack of phonetic and intonational data on Dolgan, as well as on its neighbouring languages. Since the judgement of native Dolgan speakers, and even of my non-native ear, suggest that there are differences in the phonetics, and particularly in the intonation patterns of Dolgan and Sakha, this domain is begging for systematic research. This would involve investigation of intonation patterns in different sentence types (questions, declarative sentences, etc.) in spontaneous speech, as well as in elicitation. Spontaneous texts are essential to find the most natural intonation patterns, whereas elicited sentences must be included for cross-linguistic comparison to make sure that the exact same meaning is expressed. This comparison would have to take place primarily between Dolgan and Sakha (and perhaps other Turkic languages), followed by the same procedure for Evenki (and other Tungusic

languages) to scrutinise whether differences between Dolgan and Sakha are contact-induced. Besides conducting this research out of curiosity, its results would have broader implications for the conclusions about Dolgan prehistory. After all, changes in the sound system, and supposedly also intonation, are, like changes in morphosyntax, associated with imposition and possibly language shift. While the latter were shown to have taken place in Dolgan, more evidence of structural change affecting the sound system would certainly strengthen the case for reconstructing such a sociolinguistic context.

This naturally highlights a second area for future work, namely the composition of more annotated and comparable text corpora. The present study has confirmed their importance for the field of contact linguistics, as well as highlighted the amount of work that still needs to be done in this area. While grammars are a very rich source of language data, they normally do not provide information on frequency of use or on subtle semantic differences between grammatical constructions, both of which are important topics to investigate in language contact. While I am aware that the body of linguistic corpora is rapidly expanding, I feel the need to mention it nonetheless, since it is clear that an available annotated corpus of Evenki texts would give the conclusions of this research, in particular those regarding frequency of use, a stronger foundation.

While multi-causality of contact-induced change has been illustrated in many case studies, and many scholars have pointed out the significance of it, this recognition has not yet been sufficient to formulate a theory of language contact that is able to incorporate all these factors in a systematic way. Admittedly, the complexity of a language contact situation makes this a very daunting task indeed. The large number of variables, and the countless ways in which they may interact, will probably never allow us to develop a theory that is able to predict flawlessly linguistic outcomes from social contexts. However, while this aspiration may verge on the impossible, there is no reason why we should not try to approach this goal as closely as we can. One important initiative for the advancement of language contact theory would be the reorganisation and improved accessibility of the available material on the subject. Within the last fifty years an abundance of individual case studies has emerged for many contact situations across the world. While some are more detailed than others, they all provide data that is of crucial value for the study of contact-induced change in individual contact situations, as well as for the development of models and theories of language contact. However, in their current shape we are not able to exhaust their value to the full. They are

scattered across the literature, and since there has never been one comprehensive theoretical framework for contact-induced change, they often use different criteria and different terminology to describe the changes and their underlying motivations, which makes them hard to compare.

One way to improve this situation would be to collect all the individual case studies of contact-induced change and compile them as a searchable database. If they are analysed and coded for a set of linguistic, sociological, historical, psychological and ethnographical criteria in a cross-linguistically valid way, it would be possible to uncover correlations between social factors and their linguistic outcomes cross-linguistically in a quantitative, as well as qualitative way. While on the one hand such a database would provide a rich and detailed data source and a great body of reference for contact linguists working on individual case studies, on the other hand it would enable us to abstract away from individual cases, thus coming one more step closer to a comprehensive theory of language contact.

It is obvious that the picture of the Dolgan people and their history as represented in this thesis is far from complete. Nonetheless, I hope to have contributed to a clearer understanding of their history and to have eliminated some of the more extreme views on their identity, as well as on their language. In addition, by combining socio-historical, linguistic and genetic data, I hope to have added shape, detail and colour to the black and white sketch that Dolgan history was so far.

