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THE HISTORY AND THE CURRENT STATE OF DIALECTS OF
THE KHAKASS LANGUAGE

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Abstract

The paper examines the history of dialects of the Khakass language, which dates back to about three centuries ago. Two stages in dialect research are highlighted – pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary. The first stage is characterized by a selective approach: the area of distribution of the dialect was distinguished, individual signs of it were indicated. The first studies were more ethnographic in nature. The studies of the second stage have linguistic orientation. A comprehensive and deep study of dialects of the Khakass language begins in 1944 due to the opening of the Khakass Research Institute of Language, Literature and History. The Khakass language has developed from various languages of Turkic and assimilated non-Turkic origin. Currently, in the Republic of Khakassia, the Khakass language is a republican state language and performs limited additional functions in such social areas as education, culture, the media and some others. According to UNESCO, the Khakass language is included in the Red Book, i.e. it is part of the group of endangered languages. In modern times, a significant part of the Khakass have noticeably assimilated with the more numerous Russian-speaking population. As a result, many representatives of the indigenous population lost their language, broke away from their native culture and completely switched to Russian and the Russian way of life. Despite the relative small number of the Khakass, four territorial dialects are currently distinguished: Kachin, Sagai, Kyzyl and Shor. The employees of the Khakass Research Institute conduct regular linguistic expeditions to places of compact settlement of the Khakass.

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Keywords: Khakass language, dialects, history of language, linguistic expedition



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1. Introduction

The Khakass language belongs to the East Huna branch and the Uyghur group of Turkic languages, within which, together with the Kamasin, Chulym, Shor, Saryg-Uyghur and northern dialects of the Altai language, it makes up a special Khakass subgroup. These languages have common historical ties that arose as a result of consistent unification of Khakass and Uyghur tribes, which left common features not only for this subgroup, but also for the wider unification of peoples and languages that included the peoples and languages of the entire Uyghur-Oguz group.

The modern Khakass language is the result of the historical consolidation of tribal languages: Kachin, Sagai, Kyzyl, Shor, Koibal, Beltyr. These languages are traced in Khakass dialects, which retained the corresponding names.

In general, Khakass dialects and speech are divided into two fairly different groups: 1) a group of hushing dialects, which includes Kachin, Kyzyl, Shor dialects, as well as Koibal dialect, 2) a group of whistling dialects, which includes Sagai and Beltir dialects. The names of the dialects date back to endonyms of ethnic groups (subethnic groups) of the Khakass known since pre-revolutionary times: *Khaastar* “Kachins” (live in Shirinsky, Ust-Abakan and Altai regions), *Sagailar* “Sagayts” (Askiz and northern part of Tashtyp district), *Khyzylar* “Kyzylts” (Ordzhonikidze district and some part of Shirinsky district), *Shorlar* “Shorts” (Tashtyp district). The number of Khakass subethnic groups is greater than the above: *Piltirler* “Belyrs” and *Hoiballar* “Koybals” still live in Khakassia. However, in linguistic terms, Belyrs and Koybals lost many of their specific features, and their dialects, and according to Khakass dialectologists, merged with neighboring large dialects: Beltyr with Sagai, Koybal with Kachin.

Let us present the main phonetic features of the Khakass language dialects.

I. *Kachin dialect.*

In terms of consonants:

- 1) presence of consonants *ч* in all positions in a word, for example: *чегедек* “sleeveless jacket”, *нычарга* “cut, draft a pattern”;
- 2) presence in some words of the initial voiced *б* instead of a deaf *п* in the literary language, for example, *бөрпк* “cap”;
- 3) in single cases, one can observe the correspondence *с – ш*, for example: *күһнек* “shirt, dress”.

In terms of vowels:

- 1) mild lip harmony in multisyllable words, for example: *чүстүкмиг* “with a ring”;
- 2) formation of long vowels in words ending with *х, з/к* when attaching affixes beginning with a vowel, for example: *маймаам* “my shoes”;
- 3) use of long vowels both at the base and in affixes of words, for example: *эммек* “a ring of wire for making earrings”.

II. *Sagai dialect.*

In terms of consonants:

- 1) absence of hushing consonants *ш/ж* in primary words and their replacement with *с/з*;
- 2) absence of finite *ч/у* in primary words and the transition of these consonants to *с/з*;

3) existence of *ч* at the beginning of words only in a position of initial *й-ж-д-ж-й-с* from other Turkic languages and transition *ч > с* in other cases, for example: *чөөк* “type of embroidery from color threads”, *жук* “seam”, *жуек* “type of embroidery”.

In terms of vowels:

1) transition *о > у*, for example: *туһ* “fur coat”;

2) transition *ö > ү*, for example: *нүрик* “hat”;

3) phenomenon of metathesis, for example, *сүрбек* “rag”.

III. *Kyzyl dialect.*

1) presence of consonant phonemes *у/ж* and *ү* in primary words instead of *с/з* in the literary language, for example: *шекнеһ* “national summer coat of thin cloth”;

2) transition of *у* into *е (э)*, for example: *эдек* “border of clothes”.

IV. *Shor dialect.*

1) presence of consonants *у* and *ж* in primary words;

2) violation of synharmonism of vowels.

When creating the Khakass literary language, the Kachin dialect was taken as the basis. This choice was associated with the dominant position of the Kachins among the intelligentsia during the appearance of the Khakass script in 1926.

2. Problem Statement

According to UNESCO, the Khakass language is included into the Red Book, i.e. it is part of the group of endangered languages. According to the available Russian classifications of indigenous languages, the Khakass language traditionally belongs to a group of languages with a favorable forecast of development and vitality. It is worth noting that the language situation in the Republic of Khakassia, recorded by population censuses and research of scientists, is characterized by a steady decrease in people who speak the Khakass language (Borgoyakova & Guseynova, 2012). According to the ethnic composition of the population, Khakassia remains an autonomy comparable to the Russian Federation as a whole, in which more than 80 % of the population are Russians, the second largest – Turkic-speaking peoples. According to the 2010 census, in the Republic of Khakassia Russians make up 81.7 %, Khakass – 12.1 %, Germans and Ukrainians – 1 % each. In the modern world, consolidation processes are taking place very quickly, i.e. the unification of languages and dialects, assimilation, i.e. the assimilation of languages of small nationalities, transition to the languages of larger nationalities. This process is objective, and it is hardly possible to stop it. In the context of the threat of the disappearance of languages and dialects, there is an urgent need to collect, accumulate, fix language data to identify their phonetic, lexical, morphological, syntactic features. The creation of a fund of accumulated data in the future may be the basis for the revival and further study of a lost language or a dialect. Many of these tasks can be solved by complex linguistic expeditions.

Currently, in the Republic of Khakassia, the Khakass language is a republican state language and performs limited additional functions in such social areas as education, culture, the media and some others. The situation with the degree of knowledge of the Khakass literary language can be described as typical of this group of peoples. As Baskakov (1996) notes, the share of speakers of literary forms of

Turkic languages in most cases does not exceed 10–12 %, most speak only dialect and colloquial forms. Dialect differences present in the speech of speakers of the Khakass language are manifested in the phonetic layout of statements and lexical preferences. Dialects continue to be the object of scientific research and a source for the development of the lexical system of the Khakass language.

Khakass dialectology has been framed as a science, improved and developed only in the last 5-6 decades. Therefore, many more of its problems are waiting for their solution. For example, such problems as the definition of the dialect base of the Khakass literary language, the possibility of using dialect data as one of the most important sources for identifying the history of the modern Khakass language and others were not the object of special research. Now the dialectology as one of science components about the Khakass language continues to remain relevant as it is impossible to answer many questions connected with the history of a phonetic, grammatical system and the dictionary structure of modern Khakass language without it (Subrakova, 2011).

This problem is especially urgent, since at the modern stage of social development the processes of changing dialects, the loss of specific features in them are especially intense (Vendina, 2017).

3. Research Questions

Different opinions were expressed about the time of the formation of the Khakass language and its dialects. But all scientists agree with the opinion that a single Khakass ethnos was formed from the groups of different origins by gradually merging them.

One of the first researchers of the dialects of the Khakass language was D.G. Messerschmidt, who recorded separate lexical units in 1721–1722. In 1735 G.F. Miller collected material from Kachins, Kyzylts and Sagayts for his dictionary *Lexicon or a collection of words of the Tatar language in all onago dialects in Siberia*. In 1804, an ethnographer G.I. Spassky recorded lexical material from the local population, which was included in the *Dictionary of the language used by the Kizils, Kachins and Sagaits collected in 1804* (Borgoyakov, 1981). The first researcher who comprehensively approached the collection of dialect materials on phonetics and grammar from tribes inhabiting the territory of modern Khakassia was a linguist and ethnographer Kastren (1857). In his work *Versuch einer koibalischen und karagassischen Sprachlehre* he described the Koibal dialect of the Khakass language (Kastren, 1857). Later, he prepared a collection on customs and lifestyle of the Koibals, published a work in Russian *Experience in the Study of Koibal and Karagas Dialects*, thus making a great contribution to Turkology. In 1884, Verbitsky published the *Dictionary of the Altai and Aladag dialects of the Turkic language*, where, in addition to the dictionary material itself, he also presented a dialect fragmentation of languages of the peoples inhabiting Sayano-Altai. For the first time in the history of Turkology academician V.V. Radlov presented a complete classification of the sound composition of Turkic languages. Besides, he collected materials on folklore and ethnography of local tribes, which were subsequently included in the series *Samples of folk literature of Turkic tribes*, in the works *Experience of the dictionary of Turkic dialects*, *Phonetics of northern Turkic languages* (Borgoyakov, 1981). Radlov drew attention to the formation of some dialect system. Bakhrushin (1955) confirms the opinion of V.V. Radlov, pointing out that despite the fact that the Kyrgyz Land (the so-called Khakass-Minusinsk basin in the period under consideration) was divided into several independent aimaks, it politically constituted a single whole. It is

known from the works of researchers that the population of the “Kyrgyz Land” was divided into four uluses: Altysarsky, Altyrsky, Yezersky and Tubinsky, which included different ethnic groups. Altyrsky ulus was located in the area of modern settlements Uibat-Abakan-Askiz. It included the following ethnic groups: sagay, beltyr, sayan, yellow sayan. Other ancestral groups adjoined them. Based on dictionary materials collected by G.F. Miller and other authors in the first half of the 18th century and the features of the modern Sagai dialect Borgoyakov (1976) believes that the population of the Altai principality spoke mostly *c/3*-dialect. Currently, this group has characteristic common linguistic features: (1) absence of hissing consonants *u/ɤc* in primary words and their replacement with whistling *c/3*; 2) absence of finite *u/ɤ* in primary words and the transition of these consonants to *c/3*. In addition to the Sagais and Beltyrs, the Altyr ulus included Shorts and some northern Altai clans, except for the southern Altaians. The Altysar ulus was inhabited by the ancestors of modern Kyzyls, Chulymts, partially Kachins. The Altysars lived next to the Altyrs and often united with them to participate in hostilities. The basis of the Kyzyl dialect was the dialects of the inhabitants of the indicated principality. It was the “й”-dialect in the initial position in some words (district of the Ius River). In the modern Kyzyl dialect, the presence of “й” at the beginning of a word is a residual effect in some words. The following tribes were included in Ezersky ulus: Kyrgyz, Yzyrs, Kachins, Isars, etc. According to Potapov (1957), the ethnic composition of the Kachins of the 17th century was a mixture of Samoyed tribal groups with the ethnonym “кам” with Kyrgyz Ezerians. Part of the West Siberian Tatars, i.e. the Kypchak Turkic-speaking groups adjoined them. The language of the Kachins was Turkic, basically Kyrgyz. The location of the Ezersky ulus coincides with the border of the modern settlement of the Kachins and the spread of the Kachin dialect. According to Borgoyakov (1976), the Ezerians in the 17-18th centuries spoke the “ч”-dialect (in the middle and the end of a word). The chocking sign has been to date preserved in the Kachin dialect. The question of ethnicity of the population of the Tubinsky ulus remains open. The population of this ulus was constantly attacked and hijacked. In the 18th century the descendants of the remaining part of the population became part of the Koibal Zemlitsa and partially mixed with the Kachins. The Koibal dialect that was formed from the dialects of part of the population of the former Tubinsky ulus in the 19th century assimilated with the Kachin and Sagai dialects. This process was also facilitated by the fact that the Koibal Steppe Duma was disbanded in 1858, and its uluses were separated by the Sagai and Kachinsky Duma. The listed uluses existed until the 18th century.

Katanov (1903) is considered the largest researcher of the Khakass language and its vocabulary. Already in his student years, in 1884–1888 under the supervision of V.V. Radlov, N.I. Veselovsky, I.N. Berezin, he processed and published his observations about the Sagai dialect prepared by him during his studies at the gymnasium. In 1903, Katanov defended his doctoral thesis on the topic *Experience in the study of the Uryankhai language with the indication of its main related relations to other languages of the Turkic root*, which was included in the gold fund of the world Turkology. This work presents comparative analysis of phonetic and morphological features of almost all Turkic languages and dialects, which included dialects of the Khakass language (Katanov, 1903).

At the beginning of the 20th century, Mainagashev (1914) described the distribution of Kachin, Kyzyl and Sagai dialects in geographical terms. The post-revolutionary period is characterized by appearance, formation and development of writing among the newly scripted peoples, including the

Khakass. The base of the Khakass literary language is being created. A comprehensive and deep study of the dialects of the Khakass language begins in 1944 due to the opening of the Khakass Research Institute of Language, Literature and History (KhRILLH). This was the beginning of expeditions to places of compact settlement of the Khakass. The materials of these expeditions are now stored in the handwritten fund of KhRILLH. Some candidate's theses were defended based on the material collected during the expeditions: N.G. Domozhakov (Kyzyl dialect), A.I. Inkizhekova (Sagai dialect), D.F. Patachakova (Kachin dialect), N.N. Mezhekova (Shor dialect).

In modern times, KhRILLH employees also conduct expeditions to places of compact settlement of Khakass. Thus, in 2016, a comprehensive folklore, ethnographic and linguistic expedition by the folklore sector was carried out to study Sagai and Shor dialects (Mainagasheva et al., 2017). In 2019, the expedition was carried out to study Kachin and Kyzyl dialects.

The main purpose of the expeditions was to collect modern data on the dialects of the Khakass language, namely, fixing language materials, conducting a questionnaire to identify the language situation in the villages of compact Khakass settlement. Based on the questionnaire, some aspects of the existence of dialects of the Khakass language were considered alongside with the comparative analysis of data with data from previous expeditions.

Sociolinguistic questionnaire to identify the language situation was carried out by means of a survey, fixation of language materials – by means of recording the spoken speech on electronic media in relaxed conversation, during a connected narrative about some events, when telling a biography, as well as works of oral folk art. The members of the folklore expedition to study the state of Sagai and Shor dialects noted that the tradition of the oral existence of fairy tales, legends and traditions is being lost. The situation is even worse with new proverbs and sayings. Today, the ratio of the number of Khakass subethnic groups is in favor of the Sagayans, who in a quantitative ratio exceed all other subethnic groups. It should also be noted that among Kachins and Kyzyls there is the highest percentage of people who do not speak their native Khakass language and consider Russian their native language. The language material recorded from the speakers of the Belytyr speech of Sagai dialect, as well as the Koibal speech of Kachin dialect, indicates a significant narrowing of functions of these dialects at present, as well as the Khakass language as a whole.

At present, the representatives of the older and middle generations are fluent in their native dialect, the younger generation prefers to use the Russian language, and if they speak their native language, they prefer the Khakass literary language. The functioning of the Koibal speech of the Kachin dialect has now narrowed significantly. It is already obvious that with the disappearance of the older generation, the fate of the Koibal dialect is predetermined: Koibal dialect will disappear in just two or three decades. Modern Khakass literary language is taught at schools. This state of affairs creates the feeling that there is no prospect for preserving the functions of the Koibal dialect. It can only be preserved in individual families, where parents are concerned that children know their native speech and native dialect.

A scientific expedition of the language sector of the Khakass Research Institute of Language, Literature and History conducted in 2019 to study the Kyzyl and Kachin dialect revealed their critical situation. In young families, the Khakass language is practically not used as a language of communication. To the question “Why you do not communicate in the Khakass language”, we received

the following answer: “There is no one to talk to”. During the entire period of the expedition in all settlements we managed to identify only seven families where they speak Kachin dialect of the Khakass language. There were no families where they speak Kyzyl dialect. This process is directly related to the decrease in the functions of the Khakass language in the life of the Khakass people.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to review the history of dialects of the Khakass language in the works of researchers and to assess the state and prospects of the development of the Khakass language in the Republic of Khakassia.

5. Research Methods

The study was carried out using a set of general scientific and sociolinguistic methods, including questionnaires and interviews.

6. Findings

The Khakass language has developed from various languages of Turkic and assimilated non-Turkic origin.

The Khakass language is multi-dialect. Despite the relatively small number of its carriers, there are currently four territorial dialects: Kachin, Sagai, Kyzyl and Shor.

The history of studying the dialects of the Khakass language dates back to more than three centuries ago and lasts to the present.

Scientific expeditions made to the villages of Khakassia, where the speakers of the dialects of the Khakass language live, allow analyzing their condition and collecting linguistic and folklore materials. The condition of Kyzyl and Kachin dialects is currently assessed as critical.

7. Conclusion

Thus, the Khakass people were formed from various tribal groups of Turkic and assimilated non-Turkic origin. For a long time, it has been formed from the dialects that already in the 18–19th centuries had language and cultural-social similarities. The main phonetic signs of these dialects have been preserved in the modern Khakass language. Summing up the state of the dialects of the modern Khakass language, we can note the following: in most works, certain features of dialects were noted in a comparative aspect with the material of other dialects or Turkic languages. A comprehensive study of the dialects of the Khakass language as a full-fledged system of speech communication is currently not being conducted. The rapid processes of rustication of the Khakass, the transition to the Russian language lead to the loss of thousands of years of experience of the people reflected in their native language. All this suggests the need to create a corps of samples of dialect speech and texts, which in the future will allow researchers and all interested persons addressing this fund for different purposes.

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