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33

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# INCONTRI LINGUISTICI

33

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CONSIDERATIONS ON THE SYSTEM  
AND THE ORIGINS OF TERMS  
FOR THE CARDINAL POINTS  
IN THE DOLGAN LANGUAGE

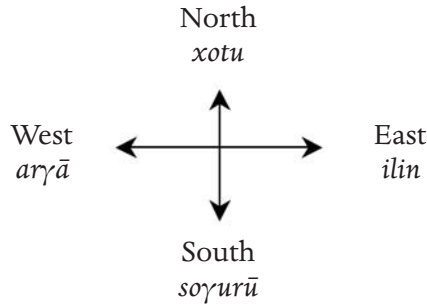
MAREK STACHOWSKI

1.

IT was about the end of the 15th or the beginning of the 16th century when the ancestors of today's Yakuts, originally speaking at least two different Turkic dialects, left their abode in the vicinity of Lake Baikal and migrated towards territories on the middle reaches of the Lena River. Their new homeland, however, was not entirely desolate; on the contrary, it was inhabited (true, somewhat sparsely) by Tungus groups. Some of them felt compelled to abandon their territories for fear of these powerful invaders, some decided to stay and to find a new *modus vivendi* with the strangers. The latter group included a Tungus tribe living on the middle reaches of the Vilyuy River and called, unsurprisingly, *Dulgan* or *Dolgan* (<  $\sqrt{dul}$  + 'middle' + *+gan*, suffix of ethnic names, i.e. 'those on the middle reaches'). In an extremely short period of time (about hundred years), the Dolgans accepted a dialect of Yakut as their own language, and they would probably have merged with the Yakuts entirely, have they not migrated (no doubt, in a number of waves) toward the Taimyr Peninsula in the first half of the 17th century (Stachowski 1996). This was the beginning of their new life, as a new nation with its own language which, from now on, developed according to its own rules.

2.

The modern Yakut system of terms for the compass points looks exactly like a European one:



The situation is quite different with Dolgan. Here, the terms seem to be nothing but chaos. Cardinal directions have more than one name:<sup>1</sup>

N – *allarā*, *kotu*, *muora*;      W – *hāp(p)at* ~ *sāpat*, *muora*, *ūhā*;  
 S – *sogurū*, *tās*, *ūhā*;      E – *allarā*, *tās*

Some terms have more than one meaning:

*allarā* – N; E      *muora* – N; W      *tās* – S; E      *ūhā* – S; W  
*hāp(p)at* – W      *kotu* – N      *sogurū* – S

Some additional remarks should also be made here:

- [2.1] The meanings of Dolg. *kotu* are not restricted to the purely geographical: '1. right (*side of one's body*); 2. northern' = Yak. *xotu* '1. lower; 2. in the north' < PTkc. *\*kōdy* > Uyg. *kody* '1. below; 2. downwards', Saryg-Uyg. *kozy* '1. below; 2. north', Tuv. *kudu* '1. low; 2. below', Ott. *kuyu* 'fountain, well' (GJV 100).<sup>2</sup>
- [2.2] Dolg. *horgo* (certainly a misprint for *\*hōrgo*) in: *horgo dākkāj* 'leftwards, to the left' < *\*sōrgo* < *\*sogorgo* < *\*sogorga*<sup>3</sup> < *\*sogoruga*

<sup>1</sup> The lexical material was excerpted from DW, DWS and KRĎ.

<sup>2</sup> SINOR 1991: 297 admittedly maintains that Dolg. *kotu* 'north' goes back to Mong. *qojitu* 'back, rear, hind; north; future, coming' (LESSING 955a) but the claim can be easily contested. First of all, the phonetic aspect: the Yakut reflex of the Mongolian sequence (-)oji- was not *\*(-)o-* but (-)oj-, as attested, e.g., in Yak. *ojmō* 'to wade' < Written Mong. *ojima* (~ *ojimu*-) id. (KALUŻYŃSKI 1961: 36). Consequently, it might be expected that the Yakut reflex of Mong. *qojitu* is *\*xojtu*, which, however, is not the case. Another doubt arises from the fact that no objection has so far been made to the indigenous Turkic etymology of Dolg. *kotu*.

<sup>3</sup> Or, maybe, rather: *\*sōrgo* < *\*sōrga* < *\*sogorga*? The chronological order of both processes (elision of intervocalic -g- and evolution of the labial attraction: *\*o - a > o - o*) remains unsettled. We only know that both processes were completed by approximately the end of the 16th century and that the elision was, in the 17th and the first half of the 18th century, followed by contraction of *\*-aga(-) > -ā(-)*, *\*-āgü- > -ō-*, *\*-āgā- > -ā-* (STACHOWSKI 2005), to which the contraction of *\*-ogo- > -ō-* (unattested in op. cit.) was possibly parallel. Since we are compelled to assume the change of PTkc. *\*jokarug* > PYak. *\*jokorug* at an early phase of Yakut phonetic evolution, the labial attraction seems to have occurred ear-

- < \*sogorugga < \*sogorugka < \*jogorugka, dat. (+ka) < \*jogorug < PYak. \*jokorug (> \*jokurug > modern Yak. *soɣurū* ‘south’) < PTkc. \*jokarug ‘located above’ (GJV 122) > Tksh. *yukan* ‘above’.
- [2.3] Yak. *uŋa* ‘1. right (side of one’s body); 2. south(ern)’ has lost its geographical sense in Dolg. where *uŋa* only means ‘right’.

3.

Barring *kotu* ‘north’ (see § 6 below) and *hāp(p)at* ‘west’, which clearly is a loan word from Russ. *zāpad* id.,<sup>1</sup> there is only one unequivocal term here: Dolg. *sogurū* ‘south’. Neither this word nor its Yakut counterpart *soɣurū* ~ *sojgurū* id. (< PYak. \*jokorug < PTkc. \*jokarug > modern Tksh. *yukan* ‘upwards’) has retained the original Proto-Turkic meaning ‘upwards’.<sup>2</sup> Its old opposition will surely have been Dolg. *allarā* with its meaning ‘north’, going ultimately back to the Proto-Turkic root \*√*al* ‘down; lower part’ (as in Ott. *al+t* ‘lower part’ as contrasted with *ūs+t* ‘upper part, surface’ < \*√*ūs* >> Dolg. *ūh+ä* ‘south’).

4.

Let us now examine Dolg. *tās* ‘1. south; 2. east’. This word goes back to PTkc. \**tāš* ‘stone’, a concept which is, in Siberia, often associated with the meaning ‘mountain(s)’.<sup>3</sup> The southern part of Taimyr can be divided

lier than generally thought. This suggests that the chain of changes of \**sogorga* > \**sogorgo* > \**sōrgo* was, after all, more possible than \**sogorga* > \**sōrga* > \**sōrgo*.

<sup>1</sup> Both Dolg. *hāp(p)at* ~ *sāpat* ‘west’ and Yak. *sāp(p)as* id. go back to the same Russian etymon: *zāpad* [-t] id. However, they are probably two independent loan words, as the different adaptations of the Russ. consonant sequence *z – t* suggest: > \**s – t* > [a] Dolg. *s – t* ~ *h – t*; [b] jak. *s – s*.

<sup>2</sup> The Yakut word means ‘1. south; 2. midday, noon’ (PEK. 2260). The semantic change of ‘upwards’ > ‘south; noon’ is explained by KONONOV (1978: 76) as a result of an erstwhile “cult of the south, of midday sun worship” (lit.: “[...] čto, konečno, bylo svjazano s kul’tom juga, s kul’tom Poludennogo solnca”). This exceedingly fanciful explanation is, eight lines later, followed by a report on E. UBRJATOVA’s opinion, expressed in the year 1966, i.e. twelve years earlier, who connected both semantic evolutions (‘upwards’ > ‘south’, and ‘downwards’ > ‘north’) with the course of Siberian rivers (always from south towards north). This, certainly correct, opinion is only cited by Kononov who does not even try to comment on it or to reconcile it with his own statement, equipped, to boot, with the categorical word *konečno*. Besides, Kononov’s concept is useless for explaining the original meaning and the semantic evolution of *allarā* (‘north’ < ‘downwards’ as a trace of an alleged cult of the north?). Furthermore, the main cardinal direction in the oldest Turkic system of compass points was neither ‘south’ nor ‘north’ but ‘east’, as we all perfectly know from Old Turkic inscriptions.

<sup>3</sup> In this context cf. ANIKIN’s (1997: 256sq.) comments on Russ. *kameń* ‘west’, *Kameń* ‘Ural’, *kamennyj veter* ‘westerly wind’, *kamennye jukagiry* ‘Mountainous Yukaghirs’. The usual Russian name for Siberian ibex (*Capra sibirica*) is *sibirskij gornyj kožěl*; however, its



into a western zone, characterized by a few lakes near the city of Norilsk, and an eastern one with its Putorana Mountains. It is perfectly obvious that the word *tās* which has retained its appellative meaning 'stone' to the present day will refer to the eastern zone, rather than to the lakes in the western zone. And this conjecture receives support from the fact that the highest mountain in the range is called exactly *Kameń* 'Stone' (1,701 m).

It is, then, highly possible that the Dolgan word *tās*, if used as a geographical term, denotes 'southeast', rather than '1. south; 2. east'. The latter meanings probably are not its real senses, but its contextual renderings in Russian.

Another Dolgan word, namely *muora* '1. north; 2. west' (< Russ. *more* 'sea') is a perfect counterpart of *tās*. It, too, can be very well harmonized with the topography of Taimyr whose northern belt can be divided into a western zone with its access to the sea shore, and a central and eastern zone covered with the Byrranga Mountains. Again, it is highly probable that the word *muora*, which even today retains its appellative meaning 'sea',<sup>1</sup> will refer to the western zone, rather than to the mountains in the east.

This is why both 'north' and 'west' can be combined into one meaning of the word *muora*, viz. 'northwest'.

Consequently, one can connect Dolg. *tās* and *muora* with each other in order to build a NW-SE axis. Apart from *hāp(p)at* 'west' and *sogurū* 'south', discussed briefly above, as well as from *kotu* that will be discussed below, only *allarā* and *ūhā* still remain without an explanation. Fortunately, they, too, constitute an opposition; moreover, a double one:

[4.1] diachronically: *allarā* < \*√*al* 'lower part'; *ūhā* < \*√*ūs* 'upper part';

[4.2] synchronically: *allarā* '1. north; 2. east'; *ūhā* '1. south; 2. west'.

Now, if we assume here, too, that each of these words renders a complex meaning, rather than a simple one, we can translate them as:

[4.3] Dolg. *allarā* 'northeast';<sup>2</sup>

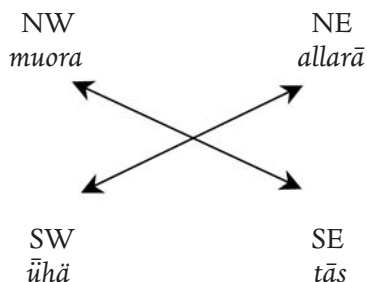
Dolg. *ūhā* 'southwest'.

name was noted by V. N. Tatiščev in the middle of the 18th century as *kamennaja koza*, lit. 'stone goat', i.e. 'mountain goat' (GURULEV 1992: 61).

<sup>1</sup> See § 8 below.

<sup>2</sup> The Yakut correspondence *allarā* does not directly designate a cardinal point: '1. situated downwards; 2. underneath world; 3. downwards; 4. northwards' (PEK. 78). It was, however, (at least dialectally) also used in the syntagm *allarāgy tyal* (Turukhansk dialect) '1. (lit.) easterly wind; 2. (fig.) east' (PEK. 79). Cf. Dolg. *ūhā* 'southwest' = Yak. *ūhā* '1. high, above, at the top; 2. height', but also *ūhāgi tyal*, lit. 'wind at the top', practically = 'northerly wind'. For the use of names for winds as terms for cardinal points cf. also Karelian *murkinatuuli*, lit. 'breakfast (*murkina*) wind (*tuuli*)' = 'southeast' (БЕОТНУ 1967: 95). This word makes it easier to understand the double meaning of Finnish *lounas* '1. southwest; 2. brunch, second breakfast, lunch'.

This enables us to suggest the following scheme representing a classical (albeit not the original) system, composed of intercardinal points:



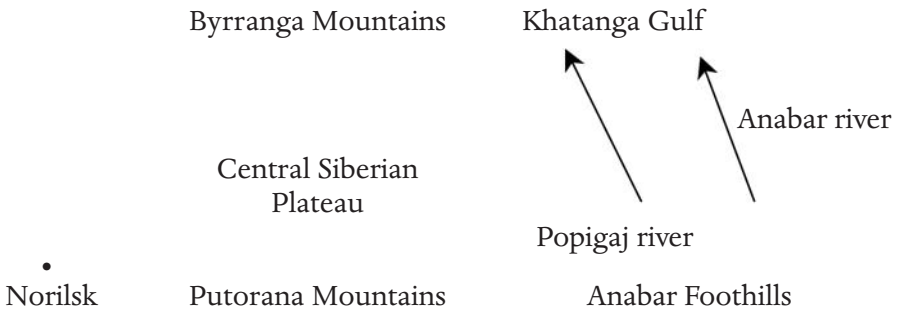
Three terms remain outside this scheme: *hāp(p)at* ‘west’, *sogurū* ‘south’, and *kotu* ‘north’ (see § 6). This seems reasonable for *hāp(p)at* which clearly is a Russian loan word that might have not been able to adapt itself to the Dolgan system (even if Russ. *more* was). The word *sogurū*, by contrast, certainly is no Russian loan word since it goes back to PTkc. *\*jokarug*. On the other hand, the word-initial *s-* is a clear sign of its Yakut provenance because Yak. *s-* = Dolg. *h-*, cf. Dolg. *horgo* vs. Yak. *soγurū* in [2.2]. In other words, Dolg. *sogurū* is no inherited word but one borrowed in relatively recent times from Yakut. The development “Dolg. *horgo* << *\*jokorug* >> Yak. *soγurū* > Dolg. *sogurū*” resembles very much the situation in the Romance languages, as in the case with French *loyal* ‘loyal’ < Latin *legalis* ‘legal’ > French *légal* id. Which shows that the Yakut language has been playing, for Dolgan, pretty much the same role as Latin has for French, with one exception, however: Yakut is not dead.

## 5.

Interestingly enough, no Old Turkic terms for cardinal points seem to have their reflexes in today’s Yakut and Dolgan. The Old Turkic terms like *bārgārū* ‘southwards’ (Clauson 364a), *berjä* ~ *birjä* ‘in the south’ (op. cit. 370a), *kurygaru* ‘westwards’, *kuryja* ‘in the west’ (op. cit. 645a), *jyrja* ‘in the north’ (op. cit. 973b), *öñrā* ‘1. in the east; 2. eastwards’ (op. cit. 189a) have possibly never reached peripheral areas of the Old Turkic kaganates. The result was that the Proto-Yakuts had to elaborate their own system of compass points. At least one word pair, i.e. Dolg. *kotu* ‘north’ = Yak. *xotu* id. suggests that the terms (or, maybe,

only some sort of a basis for a terminological system) were ready and known to Proto-Dolgans when they were starting out on their way to Taimyr.<sup>1</sup>

One of the questions connected with our subject is that of reasons for changing the original system. If the Dolgans inherited a Proto-Yakut dialect along with its (? system of) terms for the cardinal points, why did they then change the system? The immediate reason is to be sought in topographical features of Taimyr:



The Dolgan traditional folk economy generated two main reindeer pasturelands: one in the vicinity of lakes near Norilsk, and one in the lower courses of the Popigaj river (Popova 1993: 90). It can be easily seen that both areas can be connected by a slanting NE-SW line, whereas the inherited traditional N-S axis connects two mountain ranges, neither of which plays much of a role in the economic life of the Dolgans. In other words: the inherited Proto-Yakut system of cardinals proved useless in Taimyr and consequently had to be replaced by another system, one invented by the Dolgans and adapted to fit their needs. It was a system based on intercardinals that met these conditions.

## 6.

The following comparison is instructive:

[6.1] Yak. *uŋa* '1. right; 2. southern; 3. south' (Pek. 3020; GJV 76)<sup>2</sup>

[6.2] Dolg. *kotu* '1. right; 2. northern; 3. north' (GJV 100)<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Also Yakut names for 'east' (*ilin*) and for 'west' (*arγā*) clearly continue the original Proto-Turkic geographical perspective with its idea of east as the main cardinal direction, because Yak. *ilin* 'east' < 'front, fore-part', Yak. *arγā* 'west' < 'behind, at the rear'. We shall see some other lexical arguments of this kind below.

<sup>2</sup> = Dolg. *uŋa* 'right'.  
<sup>3</sup> = Yak. *xotu* '1. down, beneath; 2. in the north; 3. north'.

How come the Dolgan language associated the notion ‘right’ with the north if it is a continuation of Yakut which connects ‘right’ with the south?

The situation in Yakut continues the Old Turkic view of the east as the main cardinal direction (Jodłowska 2003: 109). It is then understandable that for a person looking eastwards the word for ‘right’ means at the same time ‘southern’. This idea was probably very well known to the Dolgans as long as they were living on the Vilyuy. However, the situation changed after their migration to Taimyr. If we assume that the change of the main cardinal direction was initiated by reindeer breeders on the Popigaj river, their point of view becomes comprehensible. For those who live on the lower reaches of the Popigaj river the only interesting migration route leads westwards (otherwise they would find themselves either at the shores of the Khatanga Gulf or in the mountains; none of which, of course, is any good for their reindeers). Now, if they face west (which will soon become the most important direction in their new landscape)<sup>1</sup> their inherited word *uŋa* ‘1. right; 2. southern; 3. south’ proves illogical because they have north on the right-hand side.<sup>2</sup> This is why this word lost its old geographical meaning and could only survive with the sense ‘right’.

But the Dolgans also had another inherited term at their disposal, namely *kotu* with its original meanings retained in Yakut: ‘1. down, beneath; 2. in the north; 3. north’. It was perfectly suitable for the landform the Dolgans could see on their way: they had mountains on the left-hand side, and a plateau on the right-hand side. Naturally the plateau was lower than the mountains. The word *kotu* described the “flatland

<sup>1</sup> Another example of a peculiar semantic change is Tkc. *öŋ* ‘front, foreside’ > Mator *um* \*‘east’ > ‘west’ (HELIMSKI 1997: 374, Nr. 1120). The reason for such a change was established already by W. SIEROSZEWSKI (1900: 102) who correctly observed a connection between the traditional placement of a door in a house and a side of one’s body used with geographical meaning (STACHOWSKI 1995: 190, § 6). All this suggests that the door was placed in the western wall of a Samoyed house, unlike the Turkic door in the eastern wall (consequently, the right hand referred to the ‘south’ in Turkic). Thus, the semantic evolution in Mator could probably even be corrected to the following: Tkc. *öŋ* ‘front, foreside’ > Mator *um* \*‘id.’ > ‘west’.

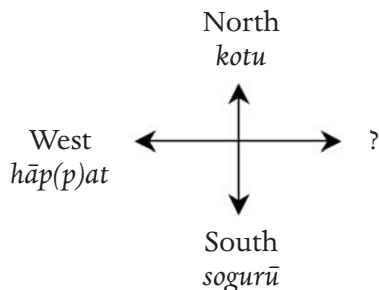
<sup>2</sup> This situation was only possible if the Proto-Dolgans could distinguish north from south, irrespective of their names, i.e. they orientated themselves by astronomical criteria like stars and their constellations (and noted that their astronomical knowledge did not correspond, in Taimyr, with non-astronomical meanings of their words). Oddly enough, the Dolgan and Yakut names of cardinal points were, unlike ours, not connected with cosmic bodies/phenomena or with the passage of time.

(1) in the north (2)” very well, indeed. And because the plateau was on the right-hand side, the word *kotu* received also a new meaning ‘right’ in Dolgan (one that is lacking in Yakut).

## 7.

The evolution of the Dolgan system of the cardinal points can be conceived in the form of four phases:

- I. The Dolgans come to the Taimyr Peninsula in the first half of the 17th century (Stachowski 1996). To begin with, they continue to use the inherited system with east as the main cardinal direction.
- II. Because of new landscape features west becomes a new cardinal direction in the Dolgan system (unlike its Yakut prototype). The word *uŋa* loses its geographical meaning (‘south’), and *kotu* receives a new, non-geographical one (‘right’).
- III. A new system is elaborated. The Dolgan compass rose only shows four intercardinal points (*muora* ‘NW’, *allarā* ‘NE’, *ūhā* ‘SW’, *tās* ‘SE’). One term remains outside the system (*kotu* ‘north’).
- IV. Two foreign words are introduced into Dolgan terminology: *hāp(p)at* ‘west’ < Russ. *zapad* id., and *sogurū* ‘south’ < Yak. *sojurū* id. They both remain outside the traditional intercardinal system. On the other hand, however, they, together with *kotu* (see Phase III), generate a new simultaneous (competing?) system (for the time being, incomplete):<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Interestingly enough, two simultaneous systems can be also observed in Europe, cf. the situation in Estonian and in Finnish:

- ‘north’ – Est. *põhi*, Fin. *pohjoinen* ~ *pohjola*; ‘south’ – Est. *lõuna*, Fin. *etelä*; ‘west’ – Est. *lääs*, Fin. *länsi*; ‘east’ – Est. *ida*, Fin. *itä*;

- ‘northwest’ – Est. *loe*, Fin. *luode*; ‘northeast’ – Est. *kirre*, Fin. *koillinen*; ‘southwest’ – Est. *edel*, Fin. *lounas*; ‘southeast’ – Est. *kagu*, Fin. *kaakko*.

Which system will become stabilized in 21st century Dolgan, still remains to be seen.

8.

The geographical meaning of *muora* ('northwest') is a Dolgan speciality, even if the word is well known from other Siberian languages, as well. Its conduits of transmission have never been studied in detail. Nevertheless, its Yakut variant *muora* (< \**mōra*) '1. sea, ocean; 2. tundra (Pek. 1634sq.); 3. *adv.* endlessly (Slepcov 1964: 151f.)' is generally thought to have been borrowed further into Tungusic languages (cf. Lamut *móra* 'tundra', Evenki *mōra* id.). R. A. Miller (2001: 61) is probably the only researcher who prefers to place these Tungusic words against a Far Eastern background in an Altaistic context.

The meanings known from Yakut are also attested in Dolgan texts which have furthermore two additional senses: 'Taiga' (Dw) and 'Sibirien und nördlicher Fernosten' (Dws). One is tempted to suggest that the original meaning 'sea' developed in two different directions:

[8.1] 'non-mountains' ← 'sea' → 'inhospitable area'

Interestingly enough, the apparently most conspicuous feature of the notion 'sea', i.e. the semantic property 'body of water' was easily lost, as can be seen from the following scheme:

[8.2] 'non-mountains' ← 'sea' → 'inhospitable area'

1) body of water

2) flat surface

3) inhospitality

The evolutionary model we have just arrived at is quite different from what one can find in the Finnish vocabulary: Finn. *meri* 'sea' → 'east' ~ 'south' ~ 'west' ~ 'southwest' (Beóthy 1967: 204) where the semantic variability results from the fact "daß die Siedlungsgebiete der betreffenden Bevölkerungsteile zum Meer in verschiedenen Richtungen lagen" (op. cit). It would therefore be especially interesting to see to what extent the Dolgan-Yakut-Tungusic semantic evolution embraced also Samoyed languages, i.e. to see whether it can be used as a criterion in establishing Siberian linguistic areas/leagues (for the notion and the definition see Urban 2007; for the situation in Siberia see Helimski 2003).

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