Two Samoyedic words in Yakut

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Introduction

With a population of c. half a million, the Yakut (Sakha) are today the most numerous indigenous people of Siberia. Controlling the titular territory of the Sakha Republic, or Yakutia, with some three million square kilometres, the Yakut are also among the most economically prosperous, politically influential, and linguistically vigorous ethnic groups in North Asia. The Yakut ethnic territory is centered around the Middle Lena basin and is surrounded on all sides by large areas which until recent times used to be inhabited by nomadic groups speaking dialects of the two Northern Tungusic (Ewenic) languages Ewen and Ewenki. To a considerable extent, the modern territorial extension of the Yakut language is the result of the assimilation of Tungusic as well as, in the northeast, Kolymic (Yukaghir) speakers, for some of whom Yakut still serves as a *lingua franca.*

In the west, the Ewenki form the population that separates the Yakut from Samoyedic speaking groups in the Yenisei basin. However, much of the territory in the northern part of the watershed between the Yenisei and Lena has historically been almost void of human population. Most importantly, the Putorana Plateau, with an area of c. 250,000 square kilometres immediately south of the Taimyr Peninsula has only partially been occupied by scattered groups of Ewenki speakers. The very name *Putorana* is of unknown origin, though it is normally assumed to derive from a local name of Lake Khantai (TT *online*). Popular explanations deriving the name from Ewenki are obviously wrong — also for the formal reason that initial *p* is a secondary phoneme in Ewenki. In fact, the name sounds more like Samoyedic, though its underlying semantics remains unknown. Somewhat further to the north, the name of Lake Pyasino and the adjoining river Pyasina are also of Samoyedic origin, apparently simply from the Nenets privative participle *pya-sy°-da* '(being) without trees'. Historically, Ewenki is a very recent newcomer to this region, and it is likely that the earlier local population, sparse though it must always have been, used to speak either (Para-)Samoyedic or, even more likely, unknown substratal languages that were extinguished by Ewenki.

The language areas of Yakut and Samoyedic do meet further in the north, on eastern Taimyr, where Ngasasan has a contact zone with Dolgan, a Yakut variety spoken by a recently Yakutized group of earlier Ewenki-speakers ([illegible] 1963). The

contact between Nganasan and Dolgan is, however, also of a very recent date and can hardly extend further back in time than the 19th century. Toponyms, notably the river name *Popigai*, from early Nganasan **po+bigaj* 'forested river', show, again, that the territory of Samoyedic speakers on Taimyr has until recently extended further east than today.

There has, however, historically also been a southern contact zone between the speakers of Samoyedic and ancestral forms of Yakut. It is well known that Yakut, a Turkic language of the so-called Lena Turkic branch (Schönig 1992), spread to its historically documented area from the south, more exactly, from the sources of the Lena immediately west of Lake Baikal. The ancestors of the Yakut speakers in this region have with some likelihood been identified with the Kurykan (also *Üį Quriqan* 'Three Kurykan'), mentioned in Chinese (骨利幹 *Guligan*), Turkic, and Mongolian sources from about the time of the rise of the Turks in Mongolia (Golden 1992: 143–144). As a Turkic language, Yakut (with Dolgan) seems to be rather closely related to the Sayan Turkic branch, which includes Tuvinian (Tyva) as well as the idioms spoken by several recently Turkicized groups of former Samoyedic speakers, including the Tofa (Karagas), Tsaatan (Dukha), Soyot, and Uighur Uryangkhai (Tuha), who occupy the taiga zone of the Eastern Sayan region southwest of Lake Baikal.

There is abundant evidence that the diversification of the Samoyedic languages started from the Upper Yenisei region, most probably specifically from the Minusinsk basin. Reflexes of the Proto-Samoyedic hydronym **yentþsi*(-) 'Yenisei' are known from all Samoyedic languages with the exception of Mator (Janhunen 2012) — in which the absence of the word may simply be due to the small size of the documented corpus — and the distribution of the historically known Samoyedic languages shows that their main direction of expansion has been from south to north. It may be assumed that Samoyedic was replaced as the dominant language of the Minusinsk basin by the intrusion of new languages, whose arrival can be linked to the appearance of new cultures in the region. Thus, while the "Scythian" Tagar culture (BZ 800–100) was probably still Samoyedic speaking, the Tashtyk culture (BZ 100–400 AZ) was dominated by Yeniseic speakers, who were then assimilated by the linguistic ancestors of the Turkic speaking Yenisei Kirghiz (after 400 AZ).

It may be noted that the Samoyedic speakers are the first identifiable linguistic group that is known to have transferred their language northwards along the Yenisei. We do not know exactly when this movement, which apparently started with the Tagar/Tashtyk cultural discontinuity, reached the Lower Yenisei and the Arctic coast, but this may have happened less than a millennium ago, with the linguistic ancestors of the Nganasan being the forerunners (ɕ ʣƵƖʣʥ ʣ 1991), who then absorbed the former inhabitants of the Taimyr Peninsula. The northward advance of Samoyedic can be particularly clearly followed in the successive locations of the two Enets groups, the Forest (Turukhan-Baikha) and Tundra (Mangazeya-Khantai) Enets (Khanina & al. 2018). The same route was later followed by Yeniseic, which also ultimately reached the Lower Yenisei, though not the Arctic coast, as well as Turkic, whose expansion stopped at the Chulym River, where it (Chulym Turkic) replaced some of the southern dialects of Selkup just a few generations ago.

The exact location of the Turkic linguistic homeland is unknown, but traces of linguistic contacts with neighbouring languages place it somewhere in northern China, west of southern Manchuria, which was the original location of Mongolic (cf. most

recently, Robbeets & al. 2020). Turkic (Macro-Turkic) spread initially to Mongolia in two waves, corresponding to the Bulgharic and Common Turkic branches. The presence of Bulgharic in Mongolia around the time when Proto-Samoyedic was still spoken on the Upper Yenisei is confirmed by loanwords with Bulgharic features, notably Proto-Samoyedic **yür* 'hundred'. Bulgharic was subsequently removed to the west and replaced by Common Turkic, until the latter, in turn, was replaced by Mongolic as the dominant language of Mongolia during the centuries before and after the rise of the historical Mongols (800–1400 AZ). Even so, Turkic remained being spoken marginally in northern Mongolia and the adjacent Minusinsk and Tuva basins, as well as in Cisbaikalia, the immediate source region of Lena Turkic Yakut.

The historical Turkic speakers in Mongolia were basically cattle nomads, who retained their lifestyle also after having adopted the Mongolian language. The same cultural adaptation is continued by the modern Tuva, and the linguistic ancestors of the Yakut took also parts of it northwards in connection with their expansion along the Lena. In the Baikal-Sayan region, the Turkic speakers encountered, however, also other cultural adaptations, which included hunting, fishing, and small-scale reindeer herding in the taiga. Since the local hunter-fisher populations in the region at that time were probably already predominantly Samoyedic speaking, it can be expected that some technical vocabulary connected with the environment was also passed over from Samoyedic to the northward expanding Turkic languages.

At this stage it must be stressed that it would be a misunderstanding if we thought that Samoyedic was always a language of hunters and fishers. Even less, of course, can the Proto-Samoyedic speakers have been engaged in activities characteristic of the modern mainstream "Samoyeds", including, in particular, the Tundra Nenets. Much more likely, Proto-Samoyedic was the language of a sedentary population that was once culturally dominant in the Upper Yenisei basin. It was from this population that the language was adopted by the small taiga-dwelling groups whom we later know as the "Sayan Samoyeds". Therefore, the last Sayan Samoyeds, including the tribes of the Kamas-Koibal and Taiga-Sayan-Mator complexes, should be understood as nothing else but originally non-Samoyedic speaking populations that had only secondarily adopted a Samoyedic language. While the main population in the Upper Yenisei basin underwent successive language shifts from Samoyedic to Yeniseic to Turkic (and ultimately to Russian), the taiga dwellers retained their Samoyedic languages longer, until they, too, were Turkicized (or also Mongolized).

From these premises we may take a look at two Samoyedic lexical items that were transmitted in the Baikal-Sayan region to the local Turkic languages, including the ancestral form of Yakut. The words are Yakut *tuut* 'ski' and *muÆa* 'fishing net'.

1. Yakut *tuut* 'ski' < Samoyedic **tutþ*

In modern Yakut *tuut* (lsƶƶls) is registered in the meaning 'ts꞊tslsʤʮ ɖ ʣ ʮ ɖ (ʧtsнвɖls ʝ ʰ ʢƶtʦʡ ʰ ʝtʧʄls ʁ ʣʘʦʑʮ ƶ)' — 'hunter's skis with fur-covered bottoms' (ꞔꞁʉ 410). Piekarski (ʉꞔꞔ 2866) lists the word with two variants, *tuut* (ḻs ls) and *tuuk* (ḻs ʢ), with the specification that the bottom of the skis is covered with fur from the forelegs of a reindeer — 'вtsʣ ʰ iʷ ʣ ʮ ɖ, ʧtsнвɖls ʷ ʰ ʢƶtʦʡ fɲ ʧʝtʥ нʤʮ꞊ ʣsɢ tsʥ ʣ', also in the combination *tuut xañïsar* (ḻs ls xʘʚ fɲʘʦ), with *xañïsar* (xʘʚ fɲʘʦ) > modern *xayïhar*

(ꟼꝹʳ hꝹꝸ), another item for (regular) ‘skis’ (ʉꞆꞆ 3253, Ꞇ꞊ʉ 475). The word is also attested in Dolgan, which has *tuut* ‘Jagdskier mit Verschalung’ (DW Suppl. 252).

So far, the only attempt to discuss the etymological connections of Yakut *tuut* has been made by Martti Räsänen, who (VEWT 502) compared it with its homonym *tuut* ‘Stenodus nelma’ [an arctic species of salmon], also *tuut balïk* (ꞩꝁꝁꞩ ʙꝹꝁ ꞔ) ‘nelma fish’ or ꞩꝁꝁɥɥꝹ꞊ (Ꞇ꞊ʉ 410), postulating the unlikely meaning ‘Schneeschuhfisch’. This explanation is *ad hoc* and, in any case, it does not lead us to the origins of the meaning ‘ski/s’. Indeed, the true source of the Yakut word is Samoyedic **tutþ*, the apparently oldest and most basic Samoyedic term for ‘ski/s’, recorded by Castrén from Nganasan as †*tutë* : *tudë-* and from Enets as (Forest) *tudo* ~ (Tundra) *turo* (WS 63, 89, 274). The word is still known in modern Nganasan (ꞁ꞊ʉ 182, 284), but in Forest Enets, at least, it seems to have been replaced by *loba* (ʕ꞊ʉ 62, 215), a cognate of Tundra Nenets *lþmpa* ‘ski/s’ (JSWb 216).

In view of the fact that **tutþ* is unattested in the other Samoyedic languages, including not only Nenets, but also Selkup, Kamas, and Mator, one could speculate that it was transmitted to Yakut directly from Nganasan via Dolgan. This is, however, a chronological impossibility, for the areal contacts of Nganasan with Dolgan and Yakut are very recent and, as it seems, culturally marginal. In fact, the word must have existed in Proto-Samoyedic, since it is an item of a Proto-Uralic origin with well-known cognates in several other Uralic languages, including Finnish *suksi*, Mordvin *soks*, Mansi *towt* (with variants), and Khanty *tÀx* (with variants) (SSA 3: 210). The Proto-Uralic shape may be reconstructed as **suksi*. As a curiosity, it may be mentioned that before the development of strict comparative methodology this word was often compared with Ewenki (*)*suuksi-lsa* (with variants) ‘ski/s’ (so also in SSA l.c.), but in reality the Uralic and Tungusic words are totally accidental lookalikes, for the Ewenki item is a derivative of the verbal root *suu-* ‘to bind (footwear)’ : *suu-kse* ‘binding (on shoes), from Proto-Tungusic **söö-* : **söö-kse*, with also other related derivatives in the meaning ‘ski/s’, e.g. Manchu *suntaha* (CCTM 2: 122, CMED 336).

Phonologically, the relationship of Samoyedic **tutþ* and Yakut *tuut* is a perfect parallel to that observed between Yakut **tïït* > *tiit* ‘Larix dahurica’ [larch tree] (ʉꞆꞆ 2689–2690) and Samoyedic **tïtþ-* ‘Pinus sibirica’ [cedar pine]. The parallelism extends to the circumstance that Samoyedic **tïtþ-* has also cognates elsewhere in Uralic (UEW 1: 445–446), deriving from Proto-Uralic **sïksi*. In both cases, the stressed vowel in the open initial syllable is represented as long in Turkic, while the unstressed reduced vowel of the second syllable is reflected as zero. We do not know for sure whether these features reflect the specifics of the underlying Proto-Samoyedic pronunciation or adaptations and diachronic developments on the Turkic side. There is, however, a potential chronological difference between Yakut *tuut* and *tiit*, in that the latter dates verifiably back to Proto-Turkic **tïït*, with reflexes in both Old Turkic and all South Siberian Turkic idioms (Janhunen 1977: 127, EDT 449, cf. also VEWT 479, where the Turkic word is mistakenly derived from Mansi, so also in UEW). Another difference is that Samoyedic **tïtþ-* is synchronically attested only in the derived shape **tïtþ-yþ-ÆÉ* (SW 160), suggesting that the borrowing may have taken place already from Late Pre-Proto-Samoyedic to Late Pre-Proto-Turkic. By contrast, Samoyedic **tutþ*, with no attestations in Old Turkic, may have been transmitted somewhat later and more locally.

2. Yakut *muǼka* 'fishing net' < Samoyedic **poǼka*

Yakut *muǼka* (ʤʑ⊐⌐Θ) is registered in dictionaries with the meaning 'ʤəʦн' — 'seine', i.e. '(large) fishing net (of the drag-net type)' (ꞔꞇʉ 245). Piekarski (ʉꞔꞔ 1632 s.v. ʤʑ ⌐Θ) gives also the variants *muuxa* (ʤ ⌐Θ) ~ *moǼko* (ʤʂ ⌐ʦ) and lists sterlet, trout, and whitefish among the types of fish caught by this type of net. The nominal root can be verbalized with the standard suffix *-lA/A-*, yielding the derivative *muǼka-la-* (ʤʑ⊐⌐ΘʤΘ) 'to fish with a seine'. The Dolgan data agree with this information, though a variant with a long vowel is also attested: *muǼka* ~ *mÎǼka* 'Art großes Fischfangnetz' : *muǼka-laa-* ~ *mÎǼka-laa-* ~ *mÎmka-laa-* 'Fische mit dem *mÎǼka*-Netz fangen' (DW 182–183, Suppl. 194–195).

The word is also attested in Ewenki and Ewen in the form (Ewenki) *muǼka* ~ (Ewen) *mŭǼka* (CCTM 1: 557), as well as in Tundra Yukaghir in the form *moǼqeǼ* (HDY 276). The Yukaghir item is most likely a borrowing from Ewen, though Yakut may also have played a role, but a more important question is whether the word was first present in Yakut or Tungusic (cf. also VEWT 344, where a Tungusic origin is favoured). The answer depends on how the connection of the Yakut and Tungusic data with Samoyedic **poǼka* 'net' is to be explained. A. E. Anikin (ʕʉꞇꞅʉ 474–475) was apparently the first to point out (in 1997) that the ultimate source of the word should, indeed, be sought in Samoyedic, where **poǼka* is attested with regular reflexes in all modern languages except Nganasan: (Tundra and Forest) Nenets *poǼka*, Enets (Forest) *poga* ~ (Tundra) *foga*, Selkup (Ket) *poǼqɒ* ~ (Taz) *poqqɒ*, Kamas (*)*poǼ*, Mator †*xoǼ* (SW 127). This gives the word an age of at least a couple of millennia, while the Yakut and Tungusic data reflect much shallower time levels.

Anikin and Helimski also later speculated that the word was first transmitted from Samoyedic to Ewenki, from which it would have advanced further to Yakut, Ewen, and Yukaghir (ɸʤʕɖʤ & ʌʝʤɖʤʃʕɖʔ 2007: 98 no. 90). This scheme is, however, incompatible with what we know of the historical circumstances. Direct contacts between Samoyedic and Ewenki started only shortly before the arrival of the Russians on the Lower Yenisei in the 16th century (Janhunen 1985), and the idea that the important technical term for 'seine', and, apparently, the underlying technology as well, would have been effectively transmitted from the Samoyeds to the Yakut by the small and scattered taiga-dwelling Ewenki-speaking tribes is not credible. Therefore, it has to be concluded that Samoyedic **poǼka* was transmitted directly to the linguistic ancestors of the Yakut at a time when the latter were still living on the Upper Lena, in the immediate vicinity of Samoyedic speakers.

The phonological relationship between Samoyedic **poǼka* and Yakut (*)*muǼka* > *muǼka* reflects the result of regular adaptation on the Turkic side. Since *p* is even in modern Yakut mainly confined to recent borrowings from Russian (the original **p* having developed to **x* > Ø already in Pre-Proto-Turkic), it was substituted by **b*, which, in turn, underwent nasalization to *m* before the following syllable-final nasal. Also, the vowel combination **o–a* was alien to Yakut, which is why it was replaced by **u–a* (the modern variant *moǼko* being probably secondary), which gave the word its attested shape (*)*muǼka.* All of this may have happened automatically at the time of

borrowing, without any intermediate forms such as **boÆka* > **buÆka* being ever involved.

As for the earlier history of Samoyedic **poÆka*, some further speculation is possible. Although there is no doubt concerning the Proto-Samoyedic dating of the item, the vowel combination **o–a* suggests that it does not go back to Proto-Uralic, for Proto-Uralic **o–a* would have yielded **a–a* in Samoyedic. There is, however, a possibility that **poÆka* is a deverbal derivative, i.e. **poÆka*, from a root **poÆ*, which, then, would have meant 'to catch (perhaps not only with a net)'. The suffix **-kA*, which itself is of Proto-Uralic origin, is attested also in a few other Proto-Samoyedic derivatives, notably **pir-kä* 'high' (SW 125), **kþmþ-ka* 'fallen tree' (SW 52), possibly also **par-ka* 'garment' (SW 115–116). As a verbal root, the form **poÆ* would be congruous with a Proto-Uralic origin, with a vocalism similar to that observed in **por-* 'to eat' (SW 127) = Finnic *pur-ra* (SSA 2: 437–438).

It happens that a verb in the shape **puÆi-* 'to catch' is present in the Mansic (Mansi-Hungarian) branch of Uralic: Hungarian *fog* and Mansi *pÎg-* (with variants) (MSzFU 1: 209–210), with less likely cognates in several other branches. Since the semantic and phonological match between Samoyedic and Mansic is perfect, we may confidently reconstruct Proto-Uralic **poÆi-* 'to catch', from which Samoyedic **poÆka* is a regular derivative. In Hungarian, this verb seems to have been confused with the possibly synonymous front-vocalic root **püÆi-*, as also attested in Finnic *püü* (*pyy*) 'partridge' : *püü-tä-* (*pyytää*) 'to catch, to hunt' (SSA 2: 452–454), which makes it impossible to determine whether Hungarian *fogoly* 'partridge' represents a secondary homonym (as is conventionally assumed) or a metonymic transition of *fogoly* 'the one that is caught' (> 'prisoner') (cf. MszFU 1: 210). The derivation of the names of important wild animals from verbs with the meaning 'to catch, to hunt' is a well-known phenomenon, as is also illustrated by the case of the Uralic words for 'hare', Hungarian *nyúl* < **ñox-ma-*, from the verb **ñox/i-* 'to chase' (Janhunen 1992).

Conclusion

Both skis and fishing nets are instruments that were unknown to the early Turkic speakers, especially those who established the historical Turkic qaghanates in Mongolia with a population following a predominantly pastoral lifestyle on the steppe. Fish is also an atypical ingredient in the traditional diet of pastoral nomads, including both Turks and Mongols. By contrast, those Turkic and Mongolic speaking groups that have entered the taiga zone or, to put it more accurately, those taiga-dwelling populations that have adopted a Turkic or a Mongolic language from the south, including, for instance, the Turks of the Altai-Sayan region and the Mongols (Buryat) of the Baikal region, are accustomed to conditions where both skis and nets are used, and where fish is an important part of the diet.

It is, then, no surprise that the words for 'ski/s' and 'fishing net', which were known to Samoyedic speakers since ancient times, were borrowed by the Turkic speakers who gradually transferred their language from the Upper Lena to central and northern Siberia, where their linguistic descendants today constitute the Yakut nation.

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