

Contact-induced changes in Tundra Yukaghir and Lower Kolyma Even

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The talk will focus on the convergence phenomena in the grammar of the languages of the Lower Kolyma tundra, a north-eastern Siberian landscape that extends over 700 km to the west of the confluence of the Kolyma River into the Arctic Ocean. This is one of the ethnically most complex areas in the Sub-Arctic zone, in which the speakers of Tundra Yukaghir (TY; Yukaghiric), Lower Kolyma Even (LKE; Tungusic), the local variety of Yakut (Turkic) and Chukchi (Chukotko-Kamchatkan) have lived together for a couple of centuries. In our investigation of the linguistic effects of language contact we will focus on TY, LKE and, to a lesser extent, Yakut.

Not surprisingly, these languages display a high level of lexical convergence, with lexemes being borrowed in both directions, including such basic lexical items as kinship terms, designations for meteorological phenomena, and some frequent verbs (Nikolaeva 2006, Sharina & Kuz'mina 2018). The mutual influences in phonology (particularly phonotactics), as well as morphological borrowing and copying are also attested to a certain extent. Two phonological phenomena shared by TY and LKE stand out: the *n/l* variation in the word-initial position (TY: *lalimə/nalimə* 'sledge'; LKE: *lɔk-/nɔk-* 'hang') and the change *r > d* after sonorants (TY: intransitivizing suffix *-r/d(ə)*, as in *l'arqu-rə* 'quiver' vs. *mol-də* 'rot'; LKE: *nanda* 'hide, skin' vs. *nanra/nanna* in other dialects). The direction of contact influence in these two cases seems to be from TY to LKE. On the other hand, there are a number of TY morphemes clearly borrowed from LKE, including the system of evaluative suffixes (the diminutive *-ča:ka:n, -ka:n*, the augmentative *-ńd'a*, the interjection suffix *-ka:*); we are not aware of morpheme borrowings in the other direction.

Perhaps more interestingly, a moderate number of structural parallels, in part also including Yakut, can be established. Morphological copying is evident in contrastive ('topical') markers derived from the copula verb (Yakut *buolla, buollayina*, LKE *bimi*, TY *ɲoldəy, ɲoldəŋ*; such forms are absent from closely related Kolyma Yukaghir), or in collective numerals expressed by converbal forms (TY *ma:rɔq:lər, kijo:lər*; LKE *umun bimi/binike:n, d'u:r bimi/binike:n* 'being one, two' etc., in contrast to other Even dialects, which use a special derivational morpheme for this function). In other cases, the resemblances are less direct but we can suspect that TY has developed new forms due to language contact, as in the case of pretensive morphemes or pejorative suffixes. In yet others, a fine-grained comparison of uses of a feature present all around Siberia reveals mutual structural influences (the generic verb of saying grammaticalised as a multi-purpose complementiser TY *monur*, LKE *gu:nike:n*). Probably the most conspicuous feature shared by TY, LKE, and Yakut is the structure of the necessitative paradigm: the Yakut future-participle-based morpheme *ĪAχ-IAχ* (*keps-iex̄tex̄-pin* 'I must tell') corresponds to the LKE future-participle necessitative (*ukč̄e:n-d'ije-w* 'I must tell'), and to the TY form *ńe:d'i-morau-ńə-jəŋ* 'I must tell'. The contact origin of this paradigm type in LKE and TY is indicated by its lack in Kolyma Yukaghir and the other dialects of Even. The direction of copying in this case is from Yakut to LKE and TY, and so is possibly the contrastive use of the copula, and the grammatical uses of the verb of saying. In other cases, TY appears to be a possible source (collective numerals), in yet others, it might be LKE (pretensive, pejorative).

In a final step, we will collate our data with what we know about the type of multilingual situation in the Lower Kolyma region and discuss to what extent the sociolinguistic setting can account for our findings. We will argue that the linguistic situation in the Lower Kolyma tundra is a consequence of three interrelated factors: (i) the relative inaccessibility of the region; (ii) the creation of an indigenous mixed culture (Vakhtin 1991, Pupynina et al. 2020, 2021), where the ethnic self-identification of the population is rather fluid, and (iii) the prolonged egalitarian multilingualism without clear dominance of one language: both TY and LKE are spoken by bilingual groups with the shared cultural practices, neither is considered to be associated with more prestige, and neither is more institutionally protected than the other.

References

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