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LONG AND SHORT VOWELS IN KHAKAS REFLEXES OF THE MONGOLIAN VCV SEQUENCE

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Abstract

Some problems connected with the phonetic adaptation of Mongolian loanwords in Khakas are discussed in the article. The focus is on non-uniform reflexes of Mongolian VCV groups, especially on the change into a short vowel in Mongolian loanwords found in the Khakas language.

The VCV complex of Mongolian loanwords in Khakas is represented by the following reflexes: [α] VCV > VCV; [β] VCV > \bar{V} ; [γ] VCV > V (?), with C = -g- ~ -y- or -j-. For instance:

- [α] WM. *kelegei* ‘stutterer’ = Khak. *kilegej* id. (MBZ 12)
 WM. *qurayan* ‘lamb’ = Khak. *xurayan* id. (MBZ 6)
- [β] WM. *ayarči* ‘whey’ = Khak. *ārčy* id. (MBZ 38)
 WM. *kirüge* ‘saw’ = Khak. *kęřē* id. (MBZ 36)
 WM. *köbege* ‘seam, edge, brim’ = Khak. *köbē* ‘edge, border’ (MBZ 36)
 WM. *qašija* ‘cowshed’ = Khak. *xazā* id. (MBZ 36)
 WM. *obuya* ‘sacrificial pile of stones’ = Khak. *obā* id. (MBZ 11)
 WM. *toya-* ‘respect, worship’ = Khak. *tō-* id. (MBZ 35)
- [γ] WM. *atararqa-* ‘envy’ = Khak. *atarxa-* id. (MBZ 39)
 WM. *arčiyul* ‘shawl’ = Khak. *arčol* id. (MBZ 12)
 WM. *erbegekei* ‘butterfly’ = Khak. *örbekej* id. (MBZ 35)
 WM. *noyuyan* ‘grass, green’ = Khak. *noyan* id. (MBZ 35)
 WM. *sorayul* ‘mouthpiece’ = Khak. *sorol* id. (MBZ 35)

First, however, it is necessary to briefly present the development of VCV groups in Mongolian languages before discussing their reflexes in Khakas. The general rule in all Mongolian languages is that the VCV sequence either developed into \bar{V}_2 (or \bar{V}_1 if $V_1 = o \sim \bar{o}$) or did not change at all (Rassadin 1982). Certain hypotheses concerning the attempts to explain why the evolution of VCV groups is not uniform are found in Rassadin (1982: 38–57). These suggest there must have been prosodic differences between V_1 and V_2 in words with VCV groups that are contracted in modern Mongolian languages. The $VCV > \bar{V}_2$ change seems to suggest that V_2 was somehow stronger, presumably stressed (however, if V_1 was represented by a low labial vowel like o or \bar{o} , it imposed labiality onto V_2). If this was not the case, the VCV group remained unchanged. However, because this argumentation has been contested for a number of reasons (see i.e. Doerfer 1964), other suggestions have also been put forward. Their common feature is a conjecture that it was an intervocalic consonant rather than a vowel that varied in the original VCV sequence. Thus, $VC_1V > \bar{V}$, but $VC_2V > VC_2V$ (for further details see Janhunen 1999, Svantesson 2005: 118–124).

The situation in Khakas is an almost perfect reflection of that in Mongolian. The Khakas reflexes of contracted Mongolian syllables are contracted as well ($\rightarrow [\beta]$), and non-contracted Mongolian syllables also remain non-contracted in Khakas ($\rightarrow [\alpha]$).

The problem is, however, that certain Khakas reflexes of Mongolian words with the original VCV group have a short vowel in lieu of a long one ($\rightarrow [\gamma]$). An explanation for this Khakas phenomenon has yet to be determined.

First, the same development, i.e. the loss of vocalic length, is also observed in Monguor and occasionally in Kalmuk, where it is treated as an irregular change (Poppe 1987: 61). The idea that Monguor or Kalmyk might have influenced Khakas nevertheless seems improbable. Perhaps it is an example of “wearing out” in much used words (Menges 1955: 130)? It is perfectly obvious that frequency, together with regular phonetic and analogous development, influences the form of words. For the idea of irregular phonetic development caused by frequency see, e.g. Mańczak (2004, 2010). Interestingly enough, Vladimircov tried to explain the non-uniform evolution of VCV sequences on the basis of frequency criterion as early as 1929 (see Vladimircov 1929: 222–33).

Secondly, a close examination of the examples mentioned in $[\gamma]$ seems to suggest that the shortening of long vowels might have been caused by the fact that the original sequence of an open and a closed syllable was contracted into one closed syllable. However, the contraction into a long vowel occurred in Mongolian, i.e. before the words were borrowed into Khakas:

WM. *soragul* (= Xlx. *sorūl*) – Khak. *sorol* (= Kč., Kyz. *sorōl*, Sag. *surūl*)

WM. *nogugan* (= Xlx. *nogōn*) – Khak. *nogan* (= Kč. *nogān*, Kyz. *noḡān*)

WM. *arčigul* (= Xlx. *arčūr*) – Khak. *arčol* (= Kč. *arčōl*)

This means that the shortening of the long vowels would have only been completed in Khakas. On the other hand, such a phonotactic rule is unknown in this language. Besides, the following example contradicts the rule suggested, because the shortened vowel is in an open syllable:

WM. *erbegekei* (= Xlx. *erbēxij*) – Khak. *örbekej* (= Kč. *örbēkej*, Kyz. *ermēkej*)

Thus, the open or closed structure of syllables has to be excluded as the decisive factor. All the more so because the standard literary Khakas short vowels more often than not have long-vowel counterparts in Khakas dialects (see above). As the Khakas literary norm is in the main derived from the Kača dialect, the regular discrepancy between the Kača (\bar{V}) and the literary Khakas (V) reflexes is surprising. This being the case, it is likely there is another explanation.

The two statements below are of fundamental importance in this context: “На письме по правилам орфографии конечные долгие **о**, **ö** и **а**, **э** обозначаются одной буквой” (Patačakova 1973: 13, fn. 7; cf. also op. cit. 30, fn. 3) and “Возьмем слово *маңзыроос* (по орфографии *маңзырос*)” (Patačakova 1973: 11). Thus, it can be inferred that the $VCV > \bar{V} > V$ development only occurs in writing as a spelling rule. Apparently two orthographic devices have emerged:

- (1) in all initial syllables and in all word-final open syllables, the length of vowel is marked in writing;
- (2) in all positions other than those in (1), the long vowel is written as a short one.

Of course, specific examples or word comparisons still need additional explanation. This is the case, for instance, with:

Khak. *atarxa*- ‘envy’ = Oir. *adarka*- id.; but cf. *-ā*- in Yak. *atāryā*-, Tuv. *adārga*- id.

Khak. *obā* ‘sacrificial pile of stones’ = Tuv. *ovā* id.; but cf. *-a* in Šr. *oma* id.

Numerous Mongolian loanwords exist in Siberian Turkic which can be added to this group. In the light of this fact, the orthographical rules (or tendencies?) observed above should be regarded rather as ‘a local solution of limited scope’. However, if the series of changes reported by Baskakov (1975: 22: “[...] в орфографии хакасского языка 1947 г. было установлено правило писать без редуцированных гласных двадцать слов, а в орфографии 1953 г. – пять слов *хро*, *тло*, *прай*, *крее*, *про*. Однако и это противоречило фонетической системе языка, поэтому новой орфографией 1963 г. было установлено беглые гласные писать во всех случаях, за исключением слова *прай* ‘все’”) were possible in Khakas orthography, the question is what was not.

Abbreviations

Yak. = Yakut; **Kč.** = Kača; **Khak.** = Khakas; **Kyz.** = Kyzyl; **Oir.** = Oiro; **Sag.** = Sagay; **Šr.** = Šor; **Tuv.** = Tuvinian; **WM.** = Written Mongolian; **Xlx.** = Khalkha

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