ON TEMPO DIVERGENCES IN MONGOLIAN LANGUAGES

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ABSTRACT

The phonetic divergences in the structure of modern mongolian languages have long been attracting the attention of scholars. Despite a great interest in Mongolian phonetics, the problem of reasons of sound alteration in Mongolian word is still very actual. There’s an opinion, expressed by V.I.Rassadin following E.Y. Vladimirtsoy that the modificaiton of phonemic aspect of Mongolian word was influenced by the general weakening of the articulation.

INTRODUCTION

The Mongolian languages, being in a foreign environment, have been greatly influenced by the languages in contact (Russian, Chinese, Turkic, Tunguso-Manchurian). Thus, for example, the change of hs, the monotony, the slowing down of the speech tempo are regarded to be the result of long-term contacts of Buryats with Evenks.

The language of the Mongols of Inner Mongolia, who had lived in the Chinese surrounding for a long time, has undergone profound structural changes. A.D. Rudnev first noted that the language of East Mongolia remains Mongolian, but the intonation, its rhythm and tempo, i.e. the external aspect of speech reminds that of Chinese /i/. In the study of the phonetic divergences of mongolian languages they do not take into consideration the prosodic data which, in our opinion, promoted their appearance.

The tempo of speech most frequently distinguished by the scientists is the prosodic difference of Mongolian dialects. A.D. Rudnev was the first to pay attention to it by saying: "of all the Mongolian tribes known to me the Buryats speak most slowly"/1/. Among Mongolian languages the literary Buryat language is singled out as a language where the non-first syllable vowels are the most distinct ones. But the dialectological material shows that the process of reduction involves most of the Buryat dialects, though the degree of reduction is not as strong as in the Kalmyk or Khalkha-Mongolian. The Mongolian scholar E.Vanadue who studied the Derbet dialect refers to the slow speech tempo of Derbets, as compared with that of Khalkha /2/. E.Y.Vladimirtsoy also pointed out the divergences in the dialects of the Volga Derbets and those of
However, the analysis of the distribution of those duration figures points out that in the Kaimyk phrase that the tempo alteration is observed throughout the whole sentence. While the tempo of pronunciation of the initial syllables in the phrases pronounced with the falling and rising melody is relatively the same. The final syllables are pronounced with divergence, the rising melody is accompanied by increasing of the sound duration of the final syllables in the phrase. The sound of intermediate syllables of the phrase in the first and the second melody types are characterized by the relatively slow duration i.e. its peculiar of them to quicken the tempo of pronunciation.

Compare: the average relative duration of the sound in the final melody at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the sentence is 2,01-1,86-1,92; in the rising 2,01-1,85-2,32 respectively.

As was noted more than once the temporal characteristics singles out the informatively significant components of the phrase. The Kaimyk language, alongside with other Mongolian languages, is characterized by the fixed word-order in the sentence where the predicate is in the final position.

However, in some styles of literary Mongolian language the inversion of parts of the sentences is perceived as a fact of normalization and legalization of the more free word order in general */5/. As a rule, parts of phrases singled out by the tempo correspond to the rheme. Informatively less significant parts of the phrase are pronounced in a higher tempo, which results in modification of the phonemic aspect of words and sometimes even in sound elimination. As for the structure of the word itself this tendency embraces all its elements. The modification of phonemic structure of Mongolian word is a thoroughly investigated aspect in literature: the development of long vowels owing to the weakening and disappearance of intervocal consonants, sporadic falling out of consonants, vowel reduction in a weak position are observed in all Mongolian languages. The Kaimyk-Mongolian is closer to the Kaimyk on the degree of reduction. We observe the complete disappearance of short vowels in speech, the degree of reduction depends on the tempo of speech; the higher the tempo, the stronger the reduction.

It is exactly this peculiarity that is responsible for typical phonetic mistakes in the Russian speech of the Mongol speaking people who haven’t quite mastered the literary pronunciation. Thus, for example, one of the marked peculiarities is the elision of non-first syllable vowels: МАН-НЯМ, НАСА-НАСО, НАГА-НАП and etc.

It is so consistent that it is frequently reflected in written speech. In the Kaimyk-Mongolian language not only separate vowels, but very often the final syllable of the word is reduced completely. If in the Kaimyk and Buryat languages the final consonant "n" which is the morphological feature of the noun is preserved when the preceding vowel falls out, in the Kaimyk language it consistently falls out too. The reduction of vowels lowers down the vocalic factor and the consonantal saturation of the word. The quickening of the speech tempo results in carelessness, indistinction in the articulation of sounds. It changes the correlation of vocatives and constitutives to a great extent and frequently leads to simplification of vocatives and sometimes to their total disappearance (especially unstable in mediolinguistic constitutive */<ж>/*), simplification of the groups of consonants due to the falling out of the consonants between the voiced, devoting of the voiced, the falling out of the constitutives. Thus, in the Buryat dialects the forelinguistic vocative */њ<ж> changes into mediolinguistic constitutive */ж<ж> and it's characteristic of Sard-Kaimyk to change the soft constitutive forelinguistic */њ<ж> by the soft constitutive mediolinguistic */ж<ж>. The original phonemic structure of Mongol word is changed due to simplification of articulation. The appearance of these changes is sufficiently substantiated by V.I. Vladimirov when he speaks of All-Mongolian tendency of weakening the tension of articulation the basis of which is the phonetic law of economizing the articulation efforts. In his "Comparative Grammar of the Mongolian
Written Language and the Khalkha Dialect" he wrote that the long final vowels in Khalkha words are weaker and more open than the long initials and the middle vowels. They are still more weakened at the absolute end of the utterance and before the pauses./3/. The economy of pronouncing efforts is carried out mainly due to falling out of sounds and vowel reduction. And these in their turn account for the reconstruction of the consonantal chain of the words. The vowels of the first syllable turned out to be untouched by the reduction as they are characterized by distinct articulation which is accounted for by their place in the word: the beginning is stronger than the end. Besides, it's required by their role in forming the vocalism of the word as they determine the vocalic structure of a vowel harmonized word. The progressive assimilation according to the vowel serie of the first syllable of the word is characteristic of all Mongolian languages. Based on the accuracy, on the distinction of pronunciation, on the vivid manifestation of all differential features of this vowel, many scholars speak of its accentuated character. Thus, most modifications in the phonetic aspect of the word are explained by the weakening of tension of organs of speech, sponsoning inaccurate articulation. This tendency is redoubled by the quickening of the speech tempo, which is characteristic to Mongolian languages, but to a greater extent to Kalmyk language and its dialects. If for the appearance of these modifications the maximum favourable position is the middle of the word, but in a phrase - the communicatively less important elements. However, with the general tendency towards the reduction of the sounds which do not belong to the first syllables in the definite phonetic positions the duration of vowels with inaccurate articulation proves to be high (in some cases - to 70ms).

In revealing the reasons of the appearance of innovations and the preservation of all its general features in the Mongolian languages it's necessary to take into account the prosodic data, such as, for example, the general speeding up of speech, the status of strong and weak elements of the phrase. Due to it the elements which are exactly in these positions undergo these changes.

/1/ A. Rudnev, "Materials of the dialects of East Mongolia", Sant-Peterburg, 1911.