ON THE PHARYNGEALIZATION IN TUNGUS-MANCHU LANGUAGES

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents some results of the experimental study of the Nanay and Udehe phonetic systems. The obtained results concern the nature and the function of the pharyngeal/laryngeal phonemes and their influence on the vowel and consonant patterns. The proposed approach allows a simple solution of some disputable morphophonological phenomena in Tungus-Manchu languages. The new interpretation of the vowel patterns of Nanay and Udehe languages given. It is shown that pharyngeal/laryngeal phonemes are marked by functional autonomy, serve as means of distinctive and delimitative function on segmental, suprasegmental and phonemicological levels. The presence of morphophonological construuctive elements in the phonemic patterns of Tungus-Manchu languages is a feature typical of the syllabomorphological language type.

INTRODUCTION

Pharyngealization has wide phonetic manifestation ranging from aspiration of consonants to pharyngealized accent in Tungus-Manchu languages. The pharyngeal /h/ was found in some Tungus-Manchu languages: Evenki, Even, Solon and some dialects of Croc'h /h/. The occurrences of aspiration of voiceless stops were mentioned in certain dialects of Evenki and Even /h/. The aspirated and glottalized vowels with the glottal stop and the burst in the middle of vowel phonation were described by E.R. Shneider /3/.

But on the whole, references to the pharyngealization in Tungus Manchu languages are scanty. The present paper concerns the phonetic nature, phonological status and function of the pharyngealization in Nanay and Udehe languages, which belong to the southern group of Tungus-Manchu languages. The investigation is based on the data obtained experimentally. The list of 350 Nanay and Udehe words was read by 10 informants, about 45-50 years old not phonetically trained, all of them unaware of the purpose of the experiment. Recordings of this material were made by means of oscillograph, intonograph, at 250 m/sec and were also treated by spectrograph.

ACOUSTIC MANIFESTATION

It is traditionally accepted that there are voiced and voiceless stops in Tungus Manchu languages. On the acoustic spectra of the Nanay and Udehe words the two sets /bdg/ and /ptk/ initially are produced with silent closure intervals and ought to be classified as voiceless whereas in medial position /bdg/ are voiced and /ptk/ are voiceless. The consonant spectra of /ptk/ are characterized by postaspiration which manifests itself as higher frequency noise /fig.1/. According to L. Backer and A. Abramson the difference between voiced and voiceless consonants is in the timing of voice onset relative to release: /bdg/ are distinctively marked by low frequency harmonics preceding the burst of the release and /ptk/ are distinctively marked by an interval of higher frequency noises immediately following the burst /4/. For Tungus Manchu languages this difference works only in part. In initial position /ptk/ from /bdg/ are voiceless and /ptk/ distinguished from /bdg/ by an audible explosion and an interval of higher frequency noises within the range corresponding to the frequency harmonics of the following vowel, i.e. aspiration /fig.2/.

The pharyngeal /h/ and the glottal /ʔ/ occur at the beginning of a spectrogram before a following vowel or at the morpheme boundary serving as a word boundary marker, e.g. Nanay: /tanki/ 'tooth'; Ulchi: /tanka/ 'small fish'; Udehe: /tanka/ 'fingers'; /nunu/ 'cook and best'; /inahib/ 'dog'; /bogor/ 'small fish'; /kowa/ 'hard'; /ogos/ 'balance'; /ejam/ 'settlement'.

The experimental data have shown that the pharyngealization/laryngealization in Udehe language is the distinctive feature of a syllable but not of a vowel as it was stated on the basis of the auditory analysis by E.R. Shneider.
The pharyngeal and laryngeal phonemes function as boundary markers between two morphemes, one ending with a vowel and the other starting with a vowel. These phonemes may be considered as morphological constructive elements, serving to link a stem and a suffix. For example, the initial glide /w/ of many verbal/noun suffixes in Nanay may be omitted. Its presence depends on the syllable structure of a stem. If the syllable of a stem has a long vowel or a diphthong which are always marked by the double peak accent, the morpheme and syllable metanalysis is not possible. If the syllable of a stem is not stressed the morpheme metanalysis is possible, e.g. Nanay: /bufuri/ 'to give', /xolaori/ 'to read'. In Udehe the unstressed syllable of a stem form a fusion with the vowel of the following suffix. In this case the pharyngeal /h/ and the laryngeal /ʔ/ which are the markers of the Past Indefinite and the Past Perfect correspondingly, are manifested as pharyngealized/laryngealized accents linking the stem with the suffix: Udehe: /wáltu/ 'they had killed'.

In conclusion it should be stated that /h/ and /ʔ/ became isolated in the pattern of consonant phonemes. This isolation was due to the functional ambiguity as these phonemes serve both as means of distinctive and delimitative function. The presence of such morphophonemic elements in the language is a feature typical of the syllabomorphemic language type.

REFERENCES