ON THE PHONOLOGY OF YAKUT FOLK CHANTS

Aleksej Klyuchevsky
Centre of Studies in Musical Folklore of Siberia and the Far East
Novosibirsk Conservatoire
Novosibirsk, USSR, 630099

ABSTRACT

This is an attempt at applying the linguistic phonetic approach to the analysis of chants /1/. A new phonetic notation is suggested and peculiarities of the phonological system of Yakut chants are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Musical culture may be seen as one more level of natural language with its own paradigmatics and syntagmatics and is in some special way connected with the phonological level of language, above all, to prosody. Or, to use another terminology, musical culture lies within the linguistic competence. Chanting brings into operation some additional rules affecting all the components of grammar and imposes some special markings in the lexicon. The semantic representation also changes. This hinders the understanding of a chant by the language-users whose linguistic competence does not include musical culture. In this case non-musical speech may be regarded as an unmarked performance with a zero feature.

1.0. The traditional five-lined tempered octave system, adequate to the European culture as it has evolved, cannot efficiently express the system of meaningful musical stylistic characteristics (musical space and time) of non-European cultures. That is why musical structures that are felt to be very simple appear rather awkward when it comes to notation. Every musical system has its own way of segmenting the sonic ambit (the scope within which melodic development occurs). Proceeding from the idea of the discrete character of modal cells, we suggest here a music notation which stands in the same relation to traditional notation in music as phonological notation is to phonemic transcription.

1.1. Basic notions.

1.1.1. Basic tones (bases). A folk chant is oriented around several basic tones (or bases), that is, pitch constants structuring musical and intonational development. Each basic tone (base) may be represented by one pitch or by a pitch zone, depending on the structural peculiarities of the melody. This allows us to classify chants according to the types of the development of basic tones (measured in kHz), as we do in classifying intonational patterns in sentences.

1.1.2. Musical Intonemes. Elementary units of a chant are discrete modal cells which we shall call musical intonemes, or, simply, intonemes. Intonemes are distinguished according to the following characteristics:

1) basic or gliding. That is, oriented or not oriented towards basic tones.
   Basic intonemes differ depending on the basic tone they are oriented around. Here they are divided into upper and lower.
   Gliding intonemes are oriented around basic intonemes and are divided into falling and rising. In our text gliding intonemes do not occur.

2) simple - complex. Simple intonemes can be short or long. Short intonemes include those with a duration of 1, 2 or 3 conventional units. Intonemes that are longer than 4 units are called long.
   Complex intonemes consist of several simple intonemes linked together.

3) ornamented - unornamented. Ornamentation is a slight constriction of the upper part of the vocal cords and a uvular trill, an active sound ejection developing into a normative constant which, with Yakuts, goes beyond speech phonation. Ornamentation can be partial preceding, partial following and continuous.
   Such ornamentation may be quite prolonged at a certain pitch. In this case, it forms a characteristic tone at a stable pitch, sustained above the fundamental tone, which gives the effect of a binary dependent phonation. This is a special type of Yakut chanting, called kIllhaq.
   Intonemes may be preceded or followed by a checked intoneme, that is, an intoneme with a duration of less than 1 unit.

1.2. Notation symbols and intoneme combinations.

(The present notation is slightly suggestive of the generally accepted notation in music, of the staves in particular. We think it quite possible that a more consistently symbolic notation /say, linear/ might be proposed. The process of analysis itself will determine the most suitable notation).

1) Basic tone (bases) ______ measured in Hz
2) a short simple unornamented basic intoneme (duration - 1)
3) —— a short simple unornamented basic intonemes (duration - 1 and 3 respectively).
4) —— a long simple unornamented basic intonemes (duration - more than 4)
5) —— following ornamentation
6) —— basic intoneme with a preceding checked element
7) —— basic intoneme with a following element
8) —— a rising unornamented gliding intoneme (duration - 1)
9) ——— following ornamentation
10) ——— basic intoneme

The elements, described may occur in various combinations. The link between elements is shown by juxtaposition or by a connecting line. E.g.

1. Groups of intonemes possess certain prosodic features (the type of prosody is clear from the context), and there are specific peculiarities of combinations of the prosodic features and units. A prosodic feature symbol is placed in front of the brackets. In case of hierarchically ordered prosodic features the order of the feature is shown by its position with respect to the brackets.

1) Idhiraq (see above) + kil (i—j
2) Inhalatory chanting (inspiration) - + inspir.
3) Exhalatory chanting (expiration) is unmarked
4) Continuous and simultaneous pharyngal and laryngeal constriction

The above elements, however, do not exhaust the vast variety of prosodic features. The hierarchy of prosodic features (the type of prosody is clear from the context), and there are specific peculiarities of combinations of the prosodic features and units. A prosodic feature symbol is placed in front of the brackets. In case of hierarchically ordered prosodic features the order of the feature is shown by its position with respect to the brackets.

2.1. There are intonemes where initial or palatal harmony is irrelevant. E.g.: doydu-daydi (the word): lab. + back (daydi), slray-slay /face :
2.2. This freedom, like prosodic features of other languages, is used in poetry in two ways: first, in alliterations, second, together with alliterations, in semantic characterization, since in many attributes of the upper world of the Yakut mythology we find lexemes with lab. + back features, whereas lexemes with lab. + back features /3/ are found to denote attributes of the lower world, that is, their distinctive-feature (and, thus, articulatory) opposition is made effective use of.

3. We have also observed certain dissimilation phenomena. For instance, a nonolabial vowel may be designated as + expir.

4. In drawling and tone-falling narrow vowels may be drawn out, too.

5. We have also observed certain dissimilation processes at junctures of wordforms within syntagms which become phonetic words.