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Chronology of some Yakut phonetic changes in the context of 18th century Mongolian loanwords into Yakut

Abstract

A painful lack of old and reliable philological sources for the history of Yakut and Dolgan has made insights into the chronology of phonetic shifts almost impossible. However, the recent publication of Gerhard Friedrich Mueller’s 18th century Siberian linguistic materials by Eugen Helimski and Hartmut Katz (†) has essentially altered the situation. In this paper Mueller’s materials are compared with Dolgan linguistic data in an initial attempt to shed light on the chronology of the phonetic changes on the basis of Mongolian loanwords adopted by Yakut. A summary of some of the tangible results of the study is shown in a table at the end of the paper.

1.

There exists no old literature in the Yak. language, and the first extensive Yak. text dates only from 1851. This fact makes philological investigations, as well as insights into Yak. linguistic chronology almost impossible. Until now, only Gy. Kara (1972) could suggest some direct chronological data on the basis of Nicolaes Witsen’s Yak. material. However, its scarcity compelled Kara to concentrate particularly on the evolution of one consonant only, namely Yak. s which has had some PTk. sources.

Fortunately, the recent publication of 18th century Siberian linguistic materials collected by Gerhard Friedrich Mueller in the years 1736–1742 (see NVS in the References) has essentially altered the situation. There is every hope that a thorough comparison of Mueller’s materials with Dolg. linguistic data may shed some new light on the chronology of the Yak. historical phonology. The present study is the first attempt at reaching this goal.

In what follows, we are first of all going to present Mo. loanwords attested in Mueller’s Yak. material. They will then be commented on and compared with some
characteristic features of Dolg. Specific inferences will be shown in a table giving chronological summings-up of our study.

Two words have been excluded from the analysis. The reason is, in both cases, the same: their Mo. origin is uncertain. This concerns Yak. abâh'y 'devil' (see Stachowski 2001: 173–180) and barča, explained in NVS 222 as puorsa, i.e. 'dried meat or fish' (see Jahnunen 1977 passim; Stachowski 1992: 110 sq.; 1995: 148 [s.v. čarba], 153 [s.v. porča]).

2.

aranas\textsuperscript{1} 'lumber-room, store-house' [NVS 221: Aranças Sulús < Arangás-Sulús > the Great Bear || der Große Bär'] = Dolg. aranas id. < *arayna (+ -(a)s < PTkc. *(a)c) < Bur. Xlx. araŋa 'platform, dais; shed; watch-tower' (Iac. 205). For semantic parallels cf. Anikin 1990: 19 sq.; ESRS 93. For other names of the Great Bear cf. also Zieme 1994 passim.

Inferences: Both [1] the derivational process (*arayna + -(a)s) and [2] the PTkc. *-c > Yak. -s alteration were completed no later than at the beginning of the 18th century. ännä 'downy' [NVS 223: ännä < Enne > id.] < *innd + MNT inže, WMo. inži (Iac. 94).

Inferences: [1] The assimilation process (*nǐ > *n-) was finished by the turn of the 18th century; [2] The vowel assimilation (*i > ā) was complete at the same time but this tendency seems to have never achieved the status of a regular sound law, cf. two Yak. ā > ā examples versus six i > ā words in GJV § 29.5, 29.2.

batas 'great knife with a broad blade and a long handle' [NVS 222: batas < Batas > id.] < *batā (+ -(a)s < PTkc. *(a)c) < *bataga < Bur. madaga id. = WMo. madagan 'dirk, dagger' (Iac. 245).

Inferences: Apart from [1] the *-c > -s change, (observed also in aranas), the following findings, complete at the turn of the 18th century at the latest, can be noticed here: [2] Mo. m- > Yak. b-; [3] Mo. -aga > Yak. *-ā. Besides: [4] *-Cā + C- > *-CaC- was in the process in the 18th century; [5] The Mo. -d- > Yak. -t- change is noticeable. The most usual Yak. reflexes of the Mo. d are both d and t (Iac. 71 sq.) but a closer examination of the word material makes it possible to suggest the following rule: Mo. -ata- > Yak. -ata- (the vowel quantity can be ignored here). Etymological groups with other vowel sequences (like adu, uđa and so on) yielded reflexes with d in Yak. The only exception seems to be Yak. satā- ~ sytā- 'to can, be able' < WMo. čida-, bur. šada- (Iac. 72). This is, however, a misleading impression, since the Yak. y variant does not reflect WMo. i but, instead, results from an indigenous analogy (cf. a ~ y alternation in: PTkc. *kat- 'to harden, become hard' > Yak. xat- 'to become dry' ~ kyt-āt- 'to become hard' [GJV

\textsuperscript{1} Headwords are modern Yak. words, whose phonetic variants, as attested in NVS, are given in brackets. Sharp parentheses <...> signal the original spelling. It is followed by the meaning of the word, given in English and separated by || from the original German meaning, as attested in NVS.
§ 1.3]; dial. Russ. drožalka ‘jellied meat’ > Yak. darahâŋka – dyrahâŋka id. [GJV § 1.8]; Mo. čabči- ‘to hew, whittle’ > Yak. čapčij- > Yak. čapčâl – čypčâl ‘sharp end, point’ [ibid.]). Thus, the voiceless consonant in Yak. satâ- – sytâ- unambiguously points to an etymon with the *ada group, i.e. to the Bur. word šada-. – Cf. batyja.

batyja, semantically = batas [NVS 222: batyja <Batijâ> id.] = Dolg. batyja ‘hunting spear’. – Usually regarded together with batas as a loanword < Mo., which, however, creates phonetic problems. The suffix -yya is unproductive today, and it only occurs in a few derivatives, mostly those of not quite clear structure and etymology (GJa 123). One of them is Yak. ktyyja ‘wooden bowl, dish’ < kytax ‘great wooden dish’ << Ar. qadaḥ ‘mug, cup’ (GJV § 1.8), a word whose suffix -yya has apparently replaced the word-final syllable -ax (in the etymon kytax), having been evidently (though falsely) identified with the indigenous nominal suffix -ax, as in Yak. byhax ‘knife’ < bys- ‘to cut’ (GJa 120). The same process probably affected the Bur. loanword batas, with its suffix -(a)s, replaced here by -yya. This time, however, the suffix -(a)s was correctly abstracted, and the change was probably facilitated by the association with the Yak. verbal stem bat- ‘to plunge (into)’; cf. also the comments in DWB 52.


Inferences: [1] The spirantization process (*-k > Yak. -x) was completed at the turn of the 18th century at the latest; [2] Sib. Russ. белъяк ‘extortion, additional requisitions’ ~ белъяк ‘gift (?)’ (Anikin 2000: 127, 133) reflect, because of their final -k, not the modern Yak. word bâlax but, instead, either the Old Yak. form *bâlâk or another Tke. phonetic variant (see above) or, maybe, the Evk. (< Old. Yak.) form belek id.

žalbûr ‘a shaman’s whip/knout’ [? = NVS 223: žalbu <Dschalbû> ‘a shaman’s stick/wand || (magisches) Stöcklein (des Schamanen)’]. – Both the identification and the etymology of the word are uncertain, and no inferences concerning the historical phonology can be made here. For etymological connections of Yak. žalbûr see Iac. 271 s.v. žalyn.

îžâgâj ‘cow’s cheese, curd’ [NVS 223: âžâgâj <Esdcheğê> id.] < MMO. (14th–16th c.) *âžâgâj (< WMo. egejegej) > Bur. ègejej id. (cf. Iac. 56).

Inferences: [1] The contraction of WMo. ege- > Yak. ā- was completed at the turn of the 18th century; [2] The diphthongization (*â- > Yak. iâ-) must have taken place no earlier than in the second half of the 18th century.


Inferences: The *-âgâj- group was retained unchanged (a form like Yak. *kâltâj should be expected here, cf. Iac. 56 sq.) which can possibly point to another solution: WMo. kelteji- ‘to be curved’ (+ Mo. -gaj > Mo. keltegej ‘curved’) > Yak. kâltâj- id. (+ Yak. [< Mo.] -gaj > Yak. kâltâgâj ‘curved’). This version seems quite likely since the Mo. suffix is productive and very active in Yak. (Iac. 108).

Inferences: [1] The phonetic shape of the etymon is not quite certain. It is true that the WMo. word has the vowels ö – ă – ė. However, its Yak. reflex should then have a form like *köyür (cf. Yak. sûr ‘to run’ < *jügür-, whereas the attested word köyür points to an etymon like Mo. *kōkeğür rather (for Mo. -egù - Yak. -iù- see Iac. 58 sq.), and this seems to be confirmed by Tel. kökkör ‘skin churn’, Tuv. kögär id. (Anikin, ibid.); [2] The long vowel ö was still not diphthonged in Yak. in the first half of the 18th century.

moyoj ‘snake’ [NVS 225: moyoj <Mogoi, Mogói> id.] ~ moyoj id. = Dolg. moyoj id. < WMo. mogaj id. (Iac. 69).

Inferences: [1] The vowel change (o – a > Yak. Dolg. o – o) is important as it points to chronology of the Tk. vowel harmony in that it shows that vowel attraction, being the final phase of the evolution of vowel harmony, finished no later than at the turn of the 18th century; [2] The extremely rare -g > -y- change (see Iac. 81) sporadically occurred also prior to the 18th century, as shown above. However, it has never become regular or at least popular.

möölčok ‘round-headed; convex, vaulted’ [NVS 225: möölčok <Mogoltschok> ‘round [|| rund’] = Yak. möölčax ‘round block of wood’ < Old Yak. *möölčok < WMo. mögülčag, Kalm. XIX. mööldseng ‘round’ (Iac. 105 sq.).

Inferences: [1] The reduced vowels of the Kalm. and XIX. forms seem to fit the modern Yak. variants better than the WMo. vowels which do not constitute a basis convenient for the labial attraction leading to the o – o – o ~ ö – ö – ö sequence; [2] A reason for vowel palatalization is uncertain (presumably the influence of č and/or the Mo. alveolar pronunciation of l); [3] Tendency to shortening of the Mo. -č- group > Yak. -č- must have taken place in the second half of the 18th century at the earliest.

sabaraj ‘1. wide (on eagle’s paw or tail); 2. wide bowl made of birch bark’ [NVS 225: sabaraj <Sabarakii> ‘2. id. [|| Gefäß aus Birkenrinde’] < Mo. *sabaraj < WMo. sabar ‘1. claws, paws; 2. wooden fork for collecting dry dung’ (Iac. 317; Lessing 1960: 653. – On the Mo. suffix -aj [as in WMo. or+aj ‘parting of the hair’ vs. or+gil ‘top, summit’] see Poppe 1923–27: 90, DWB 7).

Inferences: [1] The Yak. s- aphaeresis must have been completed prior to the period of Mo. lexical influence, i.e. before the 13th century; [2] The Mo. suffix -aj is not very productive in Yak. (it is lacking in Kaluzhenski 1961 and GJa; nevertheless, cf. Yak. sikaj = Dolg. hikaj ‘moist, humid, wet’ < Yak. sik = Dolg. hik ‘moisture, humidity, wetness’ [DWB 7], if the basis word is Tk. (Iac. 61)). For this reason, a Mo. derivative *sabar+aj was suggested above. If this conjecture proves to be true in the future, the Yak. attestation will in a sense contribute to our knowledge of the Mo. lexical stock.

tarayaj ‘1. bald spot; 2. bald’ [NVS 226: tarayaj <Taragaì > ‘scab [|| Grind’] < WMo. tarakaj ‘bald’ = MMO. tarayaj id. (Iac. 70; ESRS 533).

Inferences: Since the WMo. intervocalic -k- usually yields -g- ~ -y- in Yak. (as in Yak. tabayaj ‘palm; paw’ < Mo. tabakaj ‘sole of the foot; paw’ [Iac. 80]), no inference can be

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2 But cf. also Dolg. bulát ~ bolot ‘sword’ << Pers. pullād ‘steel’.
drawn from the Yak. evidence as for the chronology of the borrowing process: Yak. < WMo. -k- or MMO. -γ-.

törktüt '1. a bride’s visit to her family; 2. wedding present’ [NVS 226: törküt < Türküt> ‘2. id. || (Hochzeits-) Geschenk’] < MMO. *törktüt < MMO. *törkü̞ (n)d < WMo. *törkü̞, Pl. < törküm (≈ törküm) ‘1. the family of a married woman; 2. the home of a married woman before her marriage’ (Iac. 152; Lessing 1960: 835). For the Pl. -d formations see Godziński 1985: 75 (for *-t) and Poppe 1955: 179 (for *-(n)d).

Inferences: [1] The word probably is a loan from MMO.; [2] The semantic change ('family' > ‘visit to the family’) is surely due to depluralization of the Mo. word in Yak. (otherwise, the use of an added Tkc. Pl. suffix would be expected here, i.e. *törktüt+lä̈r > Yak. *törktü̞tär).


Inferences: The word-final -ŋ of Bur. loan-words into Yak. is usually retained. Adjoining variants like salan (along with salan) ‘sloppy, careless’ < WMo. salan ‘id.; dirty; unkempt’ (Iac. 86; Lessing 1960: 664) are extremely rare, so that the Yak. word should be traced back to the WMo. etymon, rather than to its Bur. reflex.

ymdän ‘watered-down curdled milk, used as a drink’ [NVS 227: ymdän < Ümdän> ‘a dish with watered-down butter || Gericht, da Butter und Wasser diluiret wird’] ~ umdän id. < WMo. umdagan ‘drink’ (Iac. 46).

Inferences: [1] The letter <Ü> was used by G.F. Mueller to note [y] (= [i]) or [ü], but never [u]. That is why we read this word with an initial y-, even if the modern u-variant seems to be phonetically closer to the Mo. etymon. The u- > y- change was probably due to dissimilation of the labial u- and the labial -m-. It must have occurred prior to the 18th century and was merely a tendency which was not able to eliminate the older u-variant entirely; [2] The -aga- > -ā- contraction was complete prior to the 18th century.

3.

The following inferences referring to Yak. historical phonology can be drawn then:3

Vowels:

[1] *-aga(-) > *-ā(-) (-18), as in batas, ymdän (cf. also GJV § 2.6).
[2] Shortening of word-final long vowels in closed syllables resulting from a derivational process: *-ā + -C > -aC (-18), as in batas. – For a more detailed presentation of the problem see GJV § 5.9.

3 The notation in parentheses is as follows: (-18) = at the turn of the 18th century at the latest; (18+) = at the turn of the 18th century at the earliest; (2/18+) = in the second half of the 18th century at the earliest.
[3] ege- > ā- (-18), as in iäźägäj (cf. also GJV § 8.3).
[5] Diphthongization of long vowels (2/18+), as in iäźägäj, kőyüör (for more details see GJV § 1.17).

[6] u- > y- (-18), as in ymdän; the dissimilative process seems, however, to have been merely a tendency which failed to achieve a regular effect on “u + nasal” or “nasal + u” groups, cf. Yak. mung ‘border’ (not *myng), kajax ~ kuñax ‘cuirass’ (not *kyjaš ~ *kyňax) – see GJV § 35.2. But cf. also the u ~ y examples in GJV § 35.6.

[7] *i − ā > ā − ā (-18), as in änňä; this phenomenon, too, was merely a tendency (cf. GJV § 29.5).

[8] o – a > o – o (-18), as in moyoj, möyölçök ~ moyočox. – Important for the chronology of the vowel attraction.

Consonants:

[9] m- > b- (-18), as in batas (the example is important due to a lack of a nasal further in the word which does not allow for the explanation of the change by a simple dissimilation).


[11] -(a)d(a)- > -(a)t(a)- (-18), as in batas.

[12] -g- > -ŋ- (-18), as in moyoj ~ moyoj.

[13] *č > -s (-18), as in arapas, batas.

[14] *-k > -x (-18), as in bäläx.


[16] -lč- > -č- (2/18+), as in möyölčök ~ moyočox.

4 The evolution of g and ŋ in Yak. cannot be analysed here, because the distinction was ignored in the NVS notations.

The Dolgans have adopted an Old Yak. dialect probably in the second half of the 16th century and then, abandoned their homeland on the Vilyuy river and emigrated towards Taimyr, approximately in the first half of the 17th century (Stachowski 1996: 129). Thus, their language is a modern continuation of 17th century Yak.

A comparison of G.F. Muelle r’s materials with Dolg. lexicon will presumably permit us to specify and/or to backdate some of the above-listed phonetic changes:

ad [1]: The words batas and ymdän are missing from Dolg. vocabularies. Nevertheless, the -(a)ga(-) > -ā- change is well attested in Dolg., too, cf. Dolg. ulän ‘polar fox bearing autumn fur’ = Yak. ulän ‘fawn, fallow (about fox fur)’ < WMo. ulagan ‘red’; Dolg. kyťañak ‘hard, heavy’ < *kyťganak < *kytyganak < *katyanak (GJV § 2.6). Thus, the -(a)ga(-) > -ā(-) change can be backdated at least to the turn of the 17th century.
ad [2]: Shortening of word-final long vowels, too, is well attested in Dolg., cf. ahät- ‘to feed, nourish’ < ahä‘ to eat’ (DWB 79), ardak ‘rain, foul weather’ < ‘ardä- ‘to go bad, spoil’ (DWB 45). Consequently, the shortening process may be backdated at least to the beginning of the 17th century⁵.

ad [3], [4], [5]: The elision of intervocalic -g- and the following contraction of two short vowels into a long vowel preceded the subsequent diphthongization (see [5]). Since Dolg. principally has diphthongs or long vowels, the -g- elision must have been complete before the ancestors of the modern Dolgans had left their original homeland, i.e. before the beginning of the 17th century.

As to [5], the situation appears somewhat more complex. The Dolg. language has, to be sure, the same four diphthongs (va, ùä, uo, ùö) which we know from Yak. However, the labial ones have also, from time to time, their variants with long monophthongs, e.g. Dolg. nuqog ~ nóqog ~ nìqog ‘rein’, uol ~ òl ‘son’, kùöl ~ kòl ‘lake’, ùóhö ~ ùhö ‘upwards’. Now, if the diphthongization had begun before the Dolg. migration, it must have been in progress in the 17th century. What we could expect then in the 18th century is either that the diphthongization had already become complete or that it is at least still going on. Actually, in the 18th century materials which we have analysed above, there are no traces of diphthongs at all. In all the attested words, indigenous or borrowed, one can only find long monophthongs. Even if the diphthongization process would have been cut off (e.g. shortly after the Proto-Dolgans emigrated) one could expect some lexical traces of it. Unfortunately, this is not the case.

Therefore, we would like to suggest a somewhat different scenario: (1) Prior to the 17th century, a diphthongization tendency starts off in the borderland of the Yak. linguistic area;⁶ (2) The Dolgans emigrate in the first half of the 17th century and, consequently, they bring the diphthongization tendency to Taimyr; (3) In the first half of the 18th century, monophthongs are still more common in the Yak. area, whereas diphthongs are only limited to some border regions, and it was exactly this Central Yak. monophthong pronunciation which has been noted by G.F. Müller; (4) At present, Yak. diphthongs dominate over monophthongs they sprang from – this situation seems to have been first

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⁵ There exist, to be sure, some exceptions to the rule. They should be explained in another way, of course, e.g. [a] Yak. sylës ‘warm’ = Dolg. hylës id. < *hyl gač (DWB 28) with its -aš < *-gač, not < *-ač; [b] Yak. xatës ‘sturgeon’ = Dolg. kaxës id. < Yak. xatë ‘prickly, spiny, thorny’ = Dolg. kaxë ‘nail (piece of metal)’. – Because of the existence of the Dolg. counterpart, the Yak. word must not be explained as a younger derivative. Thus, we may have to reckon with a (probably marginal) dialect of Old Yak. in which the vowel shortening did not take place. This dialect has never considerably influenced the central area of Yak.; however, it has left some traces (like xatës) in the Yak. lexicon.

⁶ It would be especially fascinating, if the diphthongization and the retaining of word-final long vowels (as in Yak. xatës = Dolg. kaxës ‘sturgeon’, see above) were features typical of the same dialectal zone. This seems quite possible, since both processes counteract the loss of long vowels (no matter whether diphthongs or long monophthongs), i.e. they are two different realizations of one and the same tendency. At the moment, however, we do not have any cogent argument in support of this idea.
fully attested in the 1851 Yak. grammar by O. Böhltingk, so that the diphthongization process was presumably finished at the turn of the 19th century. Such is the situation in Dolg, too, but the Dolgans live dispersed over an immense territory and their migrating groups are often isolated from each other to such an extent that linguistic phenomena do not spread too quickly. The result of this situation is the existence of some archaic monophthong variants like köl and so on.

ad [8]: Since Dolg., too, has o - o in lieu of *o - a (as in Dolg. bosko ‘not many, little’ = Yak. boxxo ‘1. not tethered, free (-running); 2. free of charge’ < *boška, DW 63), the development of labial attraction which was the youngest phase in the evolution of the Yak. vowel harmony must have been complete already at the beginning of the 17th century.

ad [9]: The mutual relation between m- and b- in Yak. and the other Tkc. languages (cf. also words like Yak. mūs ‘ice’ = Dolg. mūs ~ būs id. in which there is no nasal consonant in the word-medial position either) create a problem which is much older than the purely Yak. linguistic history. In view of the PAIt. nature of the phenomenon it is not surprising that it is likewise attested in Dolg.

ad [12]: The Dolg. variant moyoj shows that the -g- > -y- change was in progress already at the turn of the 17th century (or even earlier). The etymological -g- variants have, however, never been totally superseded.

ad [13]: The *-č > -s change is attested from Dolg., too, so it must have been complete no later than at the beginning of the 17th century. Kara’s (1972: 435) analysis of Witsen’s materials shows that this change was complete even earlier, in any case before the end of the 16th century.

ad [14]: The Dolg. language has k ~ kʷ which corresponds to Yak. x. Since -k is more archaic, the -k > -x change must have been made after the Dolg. emigration and prior to G.F. Mueilder’s travelogue, i.e. approximately in the second half of the 17th century. The spirantized pronunciation of the modern k (i.e. kʷ) will, however, have had its source, in view of the Dolg. data, approximately at the turn of the 17th century.

ad [15]: The -nž- > -m̄- change has also its reflexes in Dolg., e.g. annỳ (< *sančyg) ‘ice-pick’ (DW 34), so it must date from the turn of the 17th century at the latest.

Consequently, the following tentative attempt at dating some phonetic changes seems to be realistic:8

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8 A dot denotes the starting point of a process. A missing dot means that the starting point is unknown. An arrow only signals the phonetic development process, without indicating, however, the opposite limit point (which is unknown), unless the latter is marked by a vertical bar. The bar marks, thus, the terminus ante quern, and, in some cases, it can presumably be moved to the left side of the table – often probably a reasonable conjecture which, however, for the time being, still remains unproven.
Phenomenon

[1] *-aga(-) > -â(-)
[2] Shortening of word-final long vowels
[3], [4] Elision of intervocalic -g-
[5] Diphthongization of long vowels
[8] Labial attraction
[12] -g> -η-
[13] *-č > -s
[14] k > x
[15] -n̂>- -nn-

16th c. 17th c. 18th c. 19th c.

Abbreviations


References


