

Genetic Divergence and Areal Convergence in Mongolic: evidence from Buryad and Dagur

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For a scholar in the field of Mongolic comparative studies it is in many aspects a challenging task to decide if an individual diachronic development is due to genetic divergence or later areal convergence. It is often the case when all or several languages in the linguistic group are compared, but from the methodological point of view it makes sense to compare languages in pairs. For the present study we have chosen to compare Buryad and Dagur. It is obvious that the comparison of a pair of languages will inevitably lead us to taking into account evidence from other neighboring and historical languages. But as far as our main focus constantly resides on the pair of languages in question occasional use of such material is completely justified and does not contradict with the basic methodological principle.

Buryad and Dagur are Northern Mongolic languages spoken in Russian Federation and Mongolia (Buryad), People's Republic of China (Buryad and Dagur). In the past a number of common words shared by Buryad and Dagur were observed by scholars who studied the Mongolic languages, dialects and written sources diachronically. The systematic study of shared Buryad-Dagur elements showed that the common elements are not limited to vocabulary and that these common elements are the result of both historical development of Proto Mongolic and later areal contacts of Buryad and Dagur.

Buryad is a Mongolic language spoken in Buryatia, Irkutsk region and Transbaikalian territory, Russian Federation, northern parts of Mongolia and one administrative unit, namely Ewenke xoshuu in Hulunbuir municipality, Inner Mongolia, PRC. The total number of speakers according to 2010 National Census is ca. 50% of total population of 461 389 Buryads in the Russian Federation. Buryad is not homogeneous and has at least five major dialects. Another Mongolic group sharing common ethnic origins with Buryads and thus being very close linguistically and culturally are the Bargu in Manchuria. There is another small ethnic

group called Khamnigan often seen as a part of Buryad, who should be regarded as a linguistically separate group, speaking a separate Khamnigan language (Janhunen 2006). Bargu and Khamnigan material will be only used when appropriate.

Dagurs once lived along the northern tributaries of the Amur river most notably including Zeya. The total population is about 140 000 with unidentified but reportedly shrinking number of speakers. Dagurs populated Nonni (Nenjiang) and its tributaries and then in the 1st half of 18th century were moved by Qing government to Khailar (Hulunbuir, Inner Mongolia) and later to Chuguchak (Xinjiang). It is the Khailar area where Buryads and Dagurs had the chance to influence each other directly. The contacts between Dagurs and Buryads in this area is the only documented case of direct Buryad-Dagur contacts. Apart from these there were Khamnigan and Bargu mediated contacts. Yet another mediator might have been Tungusic (Ewenki) spoken by various tribes on the both sides of the Lake Baikal. The traces of Dagur can be found in place names and ethnomyms in all Buryad areas.