Elements of Dolgan in the early 20th century found in the Dolgan-Russian dictionary by K.M. Rychkov

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(Kobe)

In memory of late Prof. Dr. Masahiro SHÔGAITO

On the day our great teacher and leading scholar in Turkic Linguistics, Prof. Dr. Masahiro Shôgaito, left us, the cherry trees were budding and the blossoms were almost ready to come out, as if they were preparing to see him off, adorning his way to another world with their bright sakura blossoms so that he would not feel lonely.

Prof. Dr. Masahiro Shôgaito was a great researcher. Until two weeks before his death, he continued his work, checking the proof of his last book ‘The Uighur Abhidharmakośabhāṣya preserved at the Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm’ (Turcologica 99, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 2014). After he finished checking the proof, he wrote some essays and enjoyed music and movies from his sick bed, remaining in good spirits despite his serious health condition. He was relaxed and even cheerful, considerate, and encouraging toward those around him, as he was throughout his life.

I hold the deepest respect for Prof. Dr. Masahiro Shôgaito, and I cherish warm memories of him, as does each of his pupils, not only in Japan, but also abroad.

Abstract: Dolgan is a “small” Turkic language, spoken in far north of Tajmyr Peninsula in Northern Siberis. The formation of this language well reflects the linguistic situation of the 18th – 19th centuries in Northern Turukhaskij Region, though the process of the formation itself has not been so clear. In this paper, we study the ecology of Dolgan referring to the traces of the language contact between Dolgan and other languages found in the material left by K.M. Rychkov at the beginning of the 20th century. Among these, we picked up here the word-initial consonant clusters and the “loss” of word-initial vowels.

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0. The Dolgan dictionary by K.M. Rychkov

Dolgan¹ is a rather new Turkic language spoken in the Far North of the Tajmyr Peninsula (The Russian Federation), having emerged in the 18th or 19th century. Speakers from various language communities including Yakut, Evenki, and Russian participated in the process of its formation. However, how Dolgan was formed remains unclear in spite of many interesting factors, such as the mechanism of language formation, language contact, language change, and language loss.

Since Dolgan does not have written records except for some sporadic material found in 19th-century reports by researchers from Russian Imperial academic organizations, a card dictionary of Dolgan compiled by a linguist, ethnographer, and activist K.M. Rychkov (1882–1923) is a precious linguistic resource. Rychkov’s Dolgan-Russian dictionary with 1534 entries is based on materials he collected at the beginning of the 20th century. The dictionary is preserved at the archive of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences, along with other materials on Tungusic people by Rychkov and also abundant materials on Siberia by other researchers in the period of Imperial Russia and Soviet rule.

¹ According to the 2002 census, there are about 5,000 Dolgan speakers. In the 2010 census, the number is much lower, about 1,000. Dolgan is sometimes regarded as the Tajmyr dialect of Yakut (Sakha), a language spoken by about 450,000 people.

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We study Rychkov’s dictionary, where each Dolgan word is written on a card with its Russian translation. Many of Rychkov’s works in linguistics and ethnography remain unpublished; much of the data were obtained in 1903–1913 from Tungusic people who lived in the Enisej region. Among these materials on Tungusic studies, the Dolgan dictionary is unique as a linguistic resource on a Turkic language and as a detailed dataset of the language at the time.

Rychkov’s works shed light on how the people in the Enisej region lived and how the clans and tribes interacted just before Soviet rule. The information in Rychkov’s Dolgan dictionary also shows how the language community was formed and what the ecological track of the language was like in that time and period.

In this paper, we analyze the entries of Rychkov’s Dolgan dictionary, some of which deviate from Standard Dolgan, especially focussing on the deviations as the loss of anlaut vowels and the word-initial consonant clusters.

1. Vowels and consonants of Dolgan

1.1. Vowels and consonants of Standard Dolgan

1.1.1. Vowels

\[ \begin{align*}
    i & \quad \text{i} \\
    ï & \quad \text{i} \\
    ü & \quad \text{u} \\
    ä & \quad \text{a} \\
    a & \quad \text{ö} \\
    ö & \quad \text{o} \\
\end{align*} \]

In addition to these 8 short vowels, Standard Dolgan also has 8 long vowels of the quality. The diphthongs are \( iä, ïä, üö, \) and \( uo \).

In Standard Dolgan, vowel harmony follows rules based on tongue position (front/back) and roundness. The vowel harmony rules are same as in Yakut. None of the vowels are restricted in their place of

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2 Standard Dolgan is first suggested in 1981, when E.E. Aksenova, V.N. Parfil’ev, and A.A. Barbolina suggested a Dolgan alphabet and wrote a primer book using it. In 1984, a revised version of the primer book was admitted by Институт истории, филологии и философии СО АН СССР (signed by the Chair of the Department of Filology, Prof. Dr. E.I. Ubrjatova). Till then, Dolgan speakers sometimes substituted Standard Yakut for their own language, especially in elementary education. It was also common for them to write using the Russian alphabet in their own way. (Артемьев, 2001: pp. 36–39)
occurrence. The correspondences of the vowels to Standard Dolgan letters are below:

\[ i \mapsto \text{i, } \ddot{i} \mapsto \text{и, } \dddot{i} \mapsto \text{ы, } \dddot{u} \mapsto \text{ү, } \dddot{a} \mapsto \text{э, } \dddot{a} \mapsto \text{а, } \dddot{o} \mapsto \text{о, } \dddot{a} \mapsto \text{о} \]

1.1.2. Consonants

According to Artemyev (2001: p. 53, 2007: p. 24), Standard Dolgan has 17 consonants: m, n, j, b, p, d, t, g, k, dʒ, ʧ, s, h, j, l, and r. In addition to these it has q, χ, ɢ, and ʁ as variants of k and g, respectively. The correspondence of the consonants to the standard Dolgan letters is as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{m} & \mapsto \text{м, } \\
\text{n} & \mapsto \text{н, } \\
\text{j} & \mapsto \text{нь}, \\
\text{ŋ} & \mapsto \text{ӈ, } \\
\text{b} & \mapsto \text{б, } \\
\text{p} & \mapsto \text{п, } \\
\text{d} & \mapsto \text{д, } \\
\text{t} & \mapsto \text{т, } \\
\text{g} \text{ (also ɢ, χ)} & \mapsto \text{г, } \\
\text{k} \text{ (also q, χ)} & \mapsto \text{к, } \\
\text{dʒ} & \mapsto \text{дь, } \\
\text{ʧ} & \mapsto \text{ч, } \\
\text{s} & \mapsto \text{s, } \\
\text{h} & \mapsto \text{h, } \\
\text{j} & \mapsto \text{й, } \\
\text{l} & \mapsto \text{l, } \\
\text{r} & \mapsto \text{р, } \\
\text{q} & \mapsto \text{q, } \\
\text{χ} & \mapsto \text{χ, } \\
\text{ɢ} & \mapsto \text{г, } \\
\text{ʁ} & \mapsto \text{ʁ, } \\
\end{align*}
\]

The following letters are used in contemporary Dolgan only for Russian borrowings: в, е, ё, ж, з, ф, х, ц, ш, щ, ъ, ю, я.

1.2. Vowels and consonants in Rychkov’s Dolgan dictionary

1.2.1. Vowels

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{i} & \mapsto \text{i, } \\
\text{ï} & \mapsto \text{и, } \\
\text{ü} & \mapsto \text{ү, } \\
\text{u} & \mapsto \text{у, } \\
\text{ä} & \mapsto \text{э, } \\
\text{a} & \mapsto \text{а, } \\
\text{ö} & \mapsto \text{о, } \\
\end{align*}
\]

As far as we see in Rychkov’s dictionary, different from contemporary Dolgan, the vowels ү and ӧ do not have correspondent long vowels. The diphthongs (combinations) are ĭa, ĭä, and uо. The diphthong or sequeance of vowels üö is not found, but uо and uä are found.

A vowel ĭa has two variants in Rychkov’s description, represented by the letters e and ĭ, respectively. The latter is a fronted variant of the vowel.

Vowel harmony is not consistent.

Among the 8 vowels, it should be noted that there are few entries with initial ü or ö (especially üi), which differs from Standard Dolgan.

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3 The soft sign ь is used only to represent dʒ as ĭą and щ as ԝ in Standard Dolgan.

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Rychkov uses the following letters to represent the vowels (vowels – Rychkov’s letter):

- i – i, ũ – ŭ, u – ŭ, ä – e, ä, a – a, ö – o

The long vowels forms of i, u, y, e, a, and o are indicated with a macron, as ī, ū, etc. in Rychkov’s material.

1.2.2. Consonants

Rychkov distinguished Dolgan consonants by the following 20 letters and a diacritical mark:

- b, v, g, h, d, d’, u, j, k, l, m, n, p, r, s, t, ф, x, ы, ш, and ’.

The following is the correspondence of these 20 letters and a mark to the consonants of Standard Dolgan.

- b – b, v – (b ~ v), g – g, h, ы, к, d – d, u – ф, j – j, k – k,
- l – l, m – m, n – n, щ – щ, ы – ы, п – р, r – r, s – s, t – t, ф – ф,
- х – h, ы – й, ш – й, ’

The entries beginning with the letters ы and h are bound in a card holder. This means that Rychkov regarded ы and h in word-initial position as variants of a single phoneme. He used the letter x fairly consistently as corresponding to the letter h in Standard Dolgan, while the letter h in Rychkov’s dictionary is used with non-stability for ы, y, h, or k of Standard Dolgan.

Though Rychkov was not a researcher of special linguistic discipline, we can see that Rychkov tried to distinguish the consonants of Dolgan in every entry word after examining the raw data he collected during his expeditions in 1908–1909. By examining the letters and reports cited below, which Rychkov wrote to his financial and academic supporter,

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4 This mark ‘ might be suggested to be used as a diacritical mark for palatalization of the preceding consonant in Rychkov’s dictionary. Different from contemporary Dolgan, this mark often attached not only to d and n but also to various consonants as r, s, m, t and others. As for letters w and ш, see 1.1.2.

5 Rychkov wrote as follows to Kotwitz, whose instruction he followed during his stay in the Turukhansk region: <…Отъ предпослѣдней группы - родовъ Каранто', Доӈот и Доллаr --- у меня имѣется словарь в 4500 словъ и немного фольклорнаго материала…> ‘… From the last group, namely, the Karanto clan,
the researcher on Altaic languages Dr. V.L. Kotwitz (1872–1944) in St. Petersburg, we can guess he collected about 4,500 Dolgan words during his expeditions. He examined these raw data and organized them onto 1,534 cards, namely, the Dolgan-Russian dictionary. We are to regard his description of Dolgan words are reliable enough as a phonetic description of Dolgan at that time.

2. Deviated word-initial consonants clusters

One of the deviations found in Rychkov’s Dolgan data are word-initial consonant clusters. At the time, the Altaic languages Evenki and Yakut, as well as the Samoyedic language Nganasan, were used around or in the Dolgan-speaking community. They have no word-initial consonant clusters, either. Among the languages used in the region at the time, only Russian allows consonant clusters in initial position. Although Rychkov was a Russian reseacher and this deviation in his Dolgan-Russian dictionary may be attributed to his linguistic environment, we cannot

Dongot clan, and Dolgar clan, I have a dictionary of 4500 words and some material on folklore…” (№ 49-12-6). The letter is dated 1 May 1911. In the same year on 5 December, Rychkov wrote, <... Одновременно высылаю Вамъ словарь въ 1530 корены. словъ Съв. тунгус. родовь Турх. Края jako1, Донот и Dolhar, известныхъ подъ общимъ названиемъ Долгань...> ‘... With this letter, I send you the dictionary with 1530 entries on the language of the clans of the Northern Tungusic and clans in the Turukhansk region, namely Jakol, Dongot, and Dolhar, known by the name Dolgan …”. (№ 49-12-28). Then, on 9 December, he wrote, <... На дняхъ послалъ Вамъ долганский словарь въ 1530 корени. словъ, но забылъ предупредить, что онъ долженъ быть оплаченъ особо, ибо я на него потратилъ около трехъ лѣть. Предложите его Азиатскому Музею за 300 руб, а я обещаю къ нему еще обстоятельную работу о долганахъ> ‘... Some days ago, I sent you the Dolgan dictionary with 1530 entries, and I forgot to ask you to ensure that the dictionary is paid by a special account, since it took me about 3 years to complete it. I would like to ask you to suggest that the Asia Museum pay 300 rubles for it, and I will still send the museum the detailed report on Dolgan’ (№ 49-12-30).

The letters written by Rychkov to Kotwit are preserved at the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts (IOM) of the Russian Academy of Sciences (previously the Asian Museum of the Imperial Russian Academy). The inventory of blankets here is the registration number issued by IOM for the letters cited. The English translation is by my own.
ignore the linguistic situation of the region at the time. The process of Dolgan’s formation began in the 18th or 19th century and involved Evenki, Yakut, Nganasan, and Russian speakers. The ethnographic data indicate the Russian community did not have intimate contact with local aboriginal peoples. For example, Russians began to have marriage ties with aboriginal peoples only in the latter half of the 18th century (Долгин, 1963). Rychkov’s data were collected in the period when Russian immigrants were united in the aboriginal language community and were assimilated to the community, as he wrote his research essays (Рычков (1917), (1915)). Taking into account that Rychkov scrutinised the linguistic material thoroughly and left a good copy of his dictionary, careless descriptions are expected to be rare.

The entries with word-initial consonant clusters are the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>R’s entry 6</th>
<th>R’s translation</th>
<th>Contemporary Dolgan 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. брус (brus)</td>
<td>брусь ‘beam’</td>
<td>буруус 8 (buruus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>точильный камень ‘grindstone’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. драте (dratä)</td>
<td>врозь ‘separately, apart’</td>
<td>аракса 9 (araksa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. клакыне”s (klakînä”s)</td>
<td>харчить 10 ‘grub’</td>
<td>--- 11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6 R represents Rychkov. In this column, the symbol " represents Rychkov’s mark, which might be regarded as an accent-stress. In Standard Dolgan, accent-stress is fixed on the last syllable of a word. As for accent-stress of Rychkov’s dictionary, see Фудзисиро (2014). The words in parentheses are transliterations, where the letter x by Rychkov is transcribed as h and the letter h by Rychkov is transcribed as g, h, or y by our referring to the correspondent form of Standard Dolgan. See section 1.2.2.

7 We checked the Dolgan entries of Rychkov’s dictionary with Dolgan native speakers: 2 women (higher education, middle aged) from the northern part of the Khatanga region (Красноярский край, Таймыр). The checking was done in St. Petersburg in January 2011. In this column, we cite the Dolgan words they gave in Standard Dolgan orthography.

8 The language consultant checked Rychkov’s entry as a mistake.

9 The language consultant checked Rychkov’s entry as a mistake or doubtful.

10 cf. харчиться ‘waste money on eating and drinking’ (see also Pekarskiy с.1370 кылаат (русск.) ‘кладь’; харчы кылаат ‘денежное сбережение’ кылааттаах харчылдаах кылааттаах киси ‘человек, у которого есть отложенны (сбереженная) деньги’)  

11 The language consultant did not give a correspondent word.
Among the entries cited above, A, D, F, and G are obviously influenced by Russian. In entries B, C and H, we cannot find traces of borrowing from Russian. E and I originated from Turkic (Yakut) words, which do not allow such consonant clusters in word-initial position.

Here we would like to make two points: First, in the Dolgan of Rychkov’s period, the process of accepting consonant clusters in word-initial position had begun, especially for borrowings from Russian; second, this acceptance of word-initial consonant clusters sometimes changed the words that had originated in Turkic languages, as in E and I. These points might have resulted from the generally observed loss of high vowels between consonants in the first syllables without an accent, but if Rychkov registered the forms of Dolgan then, namely, at the beginning of the 20th century, and it is the last stage of language formation of Dolgan, these deviated forms are different from the deviations which are to be ‘corrected’ by the norm of the Standard language. We have non-deviated forms which our language consultants identified as the correspondent forms or ‘correct’ forms.

In Rychkov’s dictionary, we also find many words with a high vowel between consonants in the first syllable, such as дыриӈ (dïrïŋ) ‘depth’ (Standard Dolgan: дириӈ (diřiŋ) ‘depth, deep’), ҳурук (huruk) ‘letter, written message’ (Standard Dolgan: ҳурук ‘letter, written message’), and

12 The language consultant checked Rychkov’s explanation as a mistake.
13 Rychkov did not give translation to this form.
14 The language consultant checked Rychkov’s entry as a mistake.
15 The language consultant did not give correspondent word, which they regard as a correspondent word. In Standard Dolgan, ‘coal’ is чок (chok).

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many other examples, as well as a Russian borrowing with an inserted high vowel, кыры" «край» ‘region’ (Standard Dolgan: кыры ‘region’) not *кры. However, Rychkov’s deviant Dolgan words well reflect the linguistic situation at the time when members of the proto-Dolgan language community were furnished with and accepted various word forms whose characteristics were influenced by the native-main language of the group and afterwards, the lexicon of Dolgan was compiled as a mixture of these word forms.

3. Absence of word-initial vowels in Rychkov’s Dolgan dictionary
Comparing Rychkov’s entries with the correspondent words in Standard Dolgan or with ones given by our language consultant, we see that one of the rather outstanding characteristics of Rychkov’s entries is the sporadic absence of the initial vowels, namely in the initial positions, the vowels are sometimes lost. We find the following entries whose initial vowels are lost.

A. Absence of vowel u

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>R’s entry</th>
<th>R’s translation</th>
<th>Contemporary Dolgan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>байдары&quot;м (bajdarì&quot;m)</td>
<td>братья ‘brothers’</td>
<td>убайдарым (ubajdarìm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hy&quot;ла (hu&quot;ga)</td>
<td>острый конец ‘point’</td>
<td>улук(</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ру&quot;ка (ru&quot;ka)</td>
<td>рукавица ‘mitten’</td>
<td>уруука(</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>т'уйда&quot; (t'üjda&quot;16)</td>
<td>гаснет ‘is extinguished’ (SG.3.PRES.-SF17),</td>
<td>гаснуть ‘be extinguished’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B. Absence of vowel i

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>R’s entry</th>
<th>R’s translation</th>
<th>Contemporary Dolgan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>гыр'ды&quot;м (hir'dì&quot;m)18</td>
<td>свистель ‘whistled’ (SG.M.PAST-SF)</td>
<td>иннэр (ihirær)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>тынайаби&quot;н (tïgajabi&quot;n)</td>
<td>виро</td>
<td>иттээйбиин (itïgïjïbin)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16 In the description of entries by Rychkov, we guess that ‘ indicates palatalization of the preceding consonants. See 1.2.2.
17 Commentaries by my own are marked by -SF here. Such commentaries are for the Russian translation by Rychkov.
18 Here we transcribe Rychkov’s letter ç as h. See section 1.2.2.
ты"р (tï"r) мѣшочекъ изъ мошонки оленя, итир(itir) ‘a pouch made from a reindeer’s scrota’
чиркать, пороть, дергать19 тыыр(tïïr) «поротъ»
‘strike (a match)’, ‘cut’, ‘pull’

C. Absence of vowel i

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>R’s entry</th>
<th>R’s translation</th>
<th>Contemporary Dolgan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hap (har)</td>
<td>жарить ‘fry, grill’</td>
<td>ыхаарilhaа (ihaarilhaa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hape&quot; (harü&quot;)</td>
<td>копить ‘smoke’</td>
<td>ыхаар (ihaar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ӈы&quot;рем (ŋï&quot;räm)</td>
<td>звать ‘call, invite’</td>
<td>ығыр (igïr)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ӈырембыты"м20(ŋïrëmbïtïm)

рактагы" raktagï"царь ‘tsar, king’ бактагы (baktaagï) бактагы дактар
(бактаагï д’актар)

такатам (ta"ma) неплачь ‘don’t cry’ ытыыма (tïïma)
ча (ča) холодно ‘am cold!’ ычча (čča),
тымныы" (tïmnïï)

19 In Pekarskij c.2955, the entry word тыыр «разрезывать» ‘cut, slit’ is cited. One of our language consultants also gave the word тыыр for ‘unstitch, unpick’. Here, our point is on the form тык where we compare it with the Standard Dolgan form итир.

20 This form of ӈырембытым(ŋïrëmbïtïm) is regarded as a deviated or contaminated form from the forms for 1SG.FUT of Standard Dolgan ығырыам (igïram) and 1SG.PAST ығырбытым (igïrbïtïm). Rychkov cited this form in addition to the given translation for ӈы"рем as ‘звать’ ‘call’, but he did not give a translation for this ‘incorrect’ form of contamination. Rychkov reinterpreted the entry form ӈы"рем as if the infinite form of the verb ӈыр (if in Standard Dolgan - ығыр) and ӈырембытым as a finite form of this infinitive. Since we so far have no example of such extended forms of verbs in the data from Rychkov’s dictionary, we cannot suggest whether this form extended to other finite forms or not. In spite of this entry, Rychkov also registered the entry ӈырдем (igïrdäm) with its Russian translation as звалъ (SG.M.PAST-SF), назвалъ (SG.M.PAST-SF) ‘called, named’, to which our language consultant gave the form ӈырбыта (igïrïta) ‘called’, the form of 3rd person singular of pastperfect (прежде-прошедшее) tense. The form ӈырембытым is a form like the pastperfect tense of 1st person singular.

Our language consultant gave only the latter form. The former word is known in Yakut.

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D. Absence of vowel ü

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>R’s entry</th>
<th>R’s translation</th>
<th>Contemporary Dolgan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>рöк (rök)</td>
<td>ручей 'brook, stream’ ӈырык (hïrïk) ‘ручей’</td>
<td>урёк (ŭrëk) «речка» ‘small river’, эбэ (ăbă) ‘река’ ‘river’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>сỳha”и (süga”j)</td>
<td>здоровый олөр (ölör), учүгэй (ŭçügäj)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

E. Absence of vowel о

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>R’s entry</th>
<th>R’s translation</th>
<th>Contemporary Dolgan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ho”к (ho”k)</td>
<td>чувалъ ‘Siberian stove’ охок (ohok), нётъ ‘not, no’ &quot;нет” – ёуок (huok)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The vowels absent in the absolute initial position of entries cited above are not limited in their place of occurrence in Dolgan itself nor in Yakut, Evenki, nor Russian (except for vowel ʉ in Russian).

Most of the words above might be regarded as frequently used lexical items, and it is reasonable to think Rychkov recorded the forms as they were pronounced by the speakers. If we take an entry from E, ho”к, we realize that the absence of о at the anlaut position caused homonyms, though the two meanings ‘oven’ and ‘no’ are hard to crush, the initial vowel о in the former word never has a strong motif to be lost in this word as in Rychkov’s dictionary.

Here we would like to suggest that these absence or losses of vowels are motivated by the characteristics of other contact languages, for example, Samoyedic languages such as Nganasan, whose speakers participated in the formation of Dolgan. Nganasan vowels have limitations in the initial position. In Tereshshenko (1979: pp. 27–33), in Nganasan, the vowels ʉ, ʊ, half-open e, and open e do not occur in initial position, while i, ü, ə (mid-central vowel), and a occur in all positions. The vowel ɨ does not occur frequently in initial position 22.

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22 As for the absence of vowel ʉ, the influence from Russian might be possible.
Groups A, C and E, namely, 12 out of 17 entries, might be regarded to accord with the vowel limitation in Nganasan. Also, it would be appropriate to pay attention to e. In Rychkov’s Dolgan, it is hard to find entries without e in initial position whose correspondent words in Standard Dolgan have it there. We guess this is an influence from Evenki, which the members of the Dolgan language community used at one time or before Dolgan was used. Evenki has a mid-central vowel or schwa like Nganasan. Since Evenki lacks the short vowel e, the proto-Dolgan community, which contained more than a few Evenki speakers, also might represent e as a. When Nganasan speakers had contact with Dolgan as a lingua franca, Evenki e (namely, a) was consistently kept in initial position.

As for B with loss of i and D with loss of ü, we can explain some of the data; for example, lost i might be considered to be close in sound to уі(і), but so far, we cannot judge whether the explanation is right or not.

One more thing that indicates that Dolgan in Rychkov’s time had close contact with Nganasan speakers is that ü in initial position was often preceded by consonant j, and this combination was also observed in Nganasan in the Khatangskij region (Treshchenko: p. 38), though in Nganasan, in general, ü has no limit on its occurrence in initial position. This may be attributed to the fact that Evenki does not have a rounded front vowel such as ü. Rychkov’s Dolgan dictionary has entries with initial ü, but entries beginning with jü are rare. On the one hand, this is a violation of Nganasan grammar, but on the other, it is also a violation of Standard Dolgan, since Standard Dolgan does not have consonant j in word-initial position. Another view is that it may be an influence from Evenki, which allows the combinations ja, ju, or jo word-initially. Though we cannot deny the possibility that Rychkov described consonant j before ü because he was unaccustomed to the rounded front vowel ü, we might regard, taking the above discussion into account, that the entries with initial jü or ja are deviated word forms attributable to languages whose speakers are not from the Yakut or Evenki language communities.
4. Deviated or Standard forms?

Through the deviated forms mentioned above, namely, those with word-initial consonant clusters and loss of initial vowels, we can guess what the linguistic situation was like in various language communities in the Northern Turukhansk region at the time of Rychkov’s expeditions. They used Yakut as a lingua franca, as it was widely spoken by people from various ethnic groups in Siberia. Dolgan is known as a rather newly formed language from Yakut, and in the 18th to the beginning of the 20th century, the Dolgan ethnic community was in the process of formation. We listed some of Rychkov’s Dolgan word forms deviated from the contemporary Dolgan forms, namely Standard Dolgan.

In Standard Dolgan, word-initial consonants clusters are avoided even in Russian borrowings by inserting a vowel in the first syllable (e.g. Dol. kiliäp < Rus. xlep ‘bread’) or adding a vowel before the cluster (e.g. Dol. ispiiska < Rus. spichka ‘match’). Loss of vowels in Turkic originated words is not found, either. As we see in the contemporary Dolgan in section 3, the ‘lost’ vowels in Rychkov’s data are revived.

If the Dolgan of Rychkov’s time had been maintained, there would have been another language form for Standard Dolgan. After Rychkov, the Dolgan language community itself was maintained, and the Dolgan ethnic group proceeded to form a compact community in the Tajmyr Peninsula. However, their language was ‘corrected’ by strong norms from Yakut, since the Soviet Union encouraged elementary school education and Yakut has been used as a literary language. Dolgans at school were also compelled to use Russian. Dolgan people could not avoid this and accepted the two languages mainly since 1920s for most of the 20th century. The Dolgan language community had a second dense contact with Yakut, and during this time, the latter was no longer a lingua franca but a superior language.

Rychkov’s Dolgan dictionary vividly represents Dolgan at the time it was written, and the linguistic data provide us precious keys to solve the mechanism of the process of language formation in which various language communities participated.

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ELEMENTS OF DOLGAN IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY
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