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Turkic, Mongolic and ...?

Abstract

The paper investigates the naming of the third group of the Altaic languages (the other two being Turkic and Mongolic), referred to by the researchers as Manchu, Manchu-Tungus or Tungus (Tungusic). The structures and names of languages belonging to the third group are presented together with the history of their naming as well as with the arguments for the term which should be applied for the whole group.

Although it is very old, the Altaic theory still raises controversies. Of course the main issue concerns the nature of relations between the “Altaic languages” – which, according to some, constitute a league and according to others, a family – but this is not the only controversy here. A ground for argument is also created by the names and structures of individual groups of these languages, namely Turkic, Mongolic and – let us, for the time being, call it – the third one.

The topic of this communiqué is this third group or rather the question of how to name it. Let us first say what languages belong to it. Taking into account manifold data found in different pieces of literature, we can say that these are:

- 1 language of the Evenks (Evenki) along with the dialect of several groups from the Lesser Khingan, considered in China as a separate *Oroqen*¹ nationality;
- 2 language of the Evens;

¹ Some would also mention here the Solon dialect. However, the Solon group is nowadays considered in China as part of the Evenks, thus we can omit it. As for the *Oroqen*, not long ago they constituted a gathering of territorial and clan groups (the Manegirs, Kumarchens, the so-called Mergen Tungus) called by the strangers – similarly to the Eastern Evenks – the Orochens (Chin. *Oroqen*). When in the 1950s these groups were blended into one nationality, the name *Oroqen* became official. In order to better distinguish it from other, similar ethnonyms

- 3 language of the Manchu people, along with the so-called Sibe (*Xibo*) dialect of Xinjiang²;
- 4 language of the Nanai people, along with the dialect of the Hezhens from the lower Sungari³;
- 5 language of the Negidals;
- 6 language of the Orochi
- 7 language of the Oroki
- 8 language of the Udehe
- 9 language of the Ulchas⁴
- 10 language of the Jurchens – extinct⁵

In literature these languages are talked about in three different ways: either as Manchu or Tungusic or as combinations of these two terms.

The name “Manchu” had at the beginning not so much ethnic, but rather political significance. The people, who subsequently became known under this name, were a branch of the Jurchens, who used to rule northern China as the Jin dynasty (12th–13th). They took on the name Manchu in the 17th century when, in new political circumstances, referring to Jurchen traditions became inconvenient. The origin of the name is still debatable⁶. Perhaps it might be associated with the word **manju~mantu*, which used to be a part of the titles of the Jurchen and Mohe leaders? If it meant ‘mighty’ or ‘ruler’, which is possible, then it was appropriate as the name of an increasingly powerful nation⁷.

Adopting the name “Manchu” for the whole group can rarely be found and only in older literature⁸. There is one reason behind using this name – the Manchu are – in theory – the most numerous nation⁹, they have the longest (more than 300-year-old) writing

(the Orochi, Oroki, Evenks – Orochens or Orochons) I suggest the form Orchun which corresponds to Mongolian pronunciation.

² The Sibe (approximately 40 000 people) use the Manchu language in two forms: literary, promoted by schools and dialectal, colloquial. Both forms are for them the Xibe language.

³ The Hezhens are actually a southern group of the Nanais, but in China they are seen as a distinct nationality.

⁴ In order to simplify the text I do not mention here the names under which these peoples were known in older literature, e.g. the Nanais used to be the Golds, the Evens – the Lamuts, the Evenks – the Tungus, Murchens, Orochons.

⁵ To be more precise the Jurchen classical language is extinct. It was used between the 12th–16th centuries and written with special, Chinese based characters. Its other variations still exist, e.g. under the names of the Manchu or Sibe languages (see below).

⁶ For the origin of the name *Manchu* cf. Stary G., *The Meaning of the Word “Manchu”. A New Solution to an Old Problem* // CAJ 34 (1-2), pp. 109–116.

⁷ G. Stary doubts about the credibility of this hypothesis (op. cit., p. 115), and sees in *Manchu* a wishing name, ‘may you be strong’, which indeed might have been a part of the titles.

⁸ For example the Polish exile and diarist A. Giller wrote: “The Tungus and Orochons are one people, [...] They come from a Manchu tribe”. Giller A., *Opisanie zabajkalskiej krainy w Syberii*, Lipsk 1867, p. 221.

⁹ According to official statistics, there are supposed to live almost 4,5 million Manchu people in China. However, most of them have already forgotten their language.

tradition and enviable national traditions; the Manchu Qing dynasty until recently ruled over China. But for these same reasons they are isolated in their group, hence giving to the word “Manchu” too broad a meaning is, after all, a misuse.

Let us have a look at the terms Tungus, Tungusic. Their etymology is not exactly clear. We can, however, assume that they come from the nickname Tungus given by the Samoyedic peoples to a western group of the Evenks¹⁰. The Russians, who came across the name already at the end of the 16th century, used it to refer to the other Evenks¹¹, and later to related peoples. And not only to them, for some the name Tungus became almost a synonym for the Siberian aborigines¹². Today the name is used in two senses: a) the Evenks as well as the Evens and the Negidals, whose languages and cultures are similar, and b) the described here peoples in general, including the Manchu. The latter interpretation was already used by the 19th century researcher A. R é m u s a t. Nevertheless, he was surprised to find that the name Tungus was alien to the Manchu people¹³.

Thus both of these terms – Manchu languages (and peoples) and Tungusic languages – have their justification – the latter has been rooted for years in the European tradition, the former has been a part of the here discussed language group, dominated by the Manchu language. Which one of them should we favour? This problem seems to be solved by using a “compromise” term – “Manchu-Tungusic peoples (languages)”. It is clearly preferred today¹⁴, although it has its drawbacks as well.

First of all, as a compound it is too long and thus slightly inconvenient. What is worse, the sequence of its parts is not stable. While the West knows Manchu-Tungusic languages, Russian researchers talk about Tungusic-Manchu languages. Naturally, such an ambiguity leads to confusion, especially in Poland, traditionally torn between the West and the East. For example, *Dictionary of Linguistic Terminology* knows “języki tungusko-mandżurskie” (Tungusic-Manchu languages)¹⁵, a more recent compendium by A.F. M a j e w i c z – “mandżu-tunguskie” (Manchu-Tungusic)¹⁶, and *Encyclopedia of General Linguistics*, edited by K. P o l a ń s k i, introduced the term “języki mandžo-

¹⁰ For the origin of the name Tungus cf. T u g o l u k o v V.A., *Glavneišie étnonimii tungusov (évenkov i évenov), Étnonimii*, Moskva 1970, A g e e v a R.A., *Kakogo mii rodu plemeni? Narodii Rossii: imena i sud'bi*, Moskva, T u l i s o w J., *Folklor ludów tunguskich*, Warszawa 2009.

¹¹ Not to all, however. For example, the eastern Evenks were called either Orochons or Orochens.

¹² The 19th century author N.S. Š č u k i n wrote: “From the Tungus originated so many branches [of peoples]! The Lamuts, Koryaks, Chuvans, Yukaghirs, Karagas, Daur, Solons, Natki, Gilyaks – all from the Tungus tribe”. N.S. Š č u k i n, *Poezdka v Yakutsk*, S.-Peterburg 1833, pp. 88–89 (as for the explanation: the Chuvans – a subgroup of the Yukaghirs, the Karagas – today the Tofalars, the Natki – mentioned in the 17th century Russian sources as the people of the Amur region, probably related to the Nanais, the Gilyaks – today the Nivkhs.)

¹³ „Quant au nom des Tongous, la plus illustre des nations à qui nous le donnons, la nation Mandchou le méconnoît entièrement, ou ne l'applique qu'à quelques-unes de ses plus foibles tribus.” R é m u s a t A., *Recherches sur les langues tartares*, Paris 1820, p. 28.

¹⁴ However, I have not been able to discover who and when used this term for the first time. It happened, most probably, before the Second World War.

¹⁵ Gołąb Z., Heine A., Polański K., *Słownik terminologii językoznawczej*, Warszawa 1970, p. 591.

¹⁶ Majewicz A.F., *Języki świata i ich klasyfikowanie*, Warszawa 1989, p. 53.

tunguskie” (Mancho-Tungusic languages, sic!) used alternatively with the traditional name “języki tungusko-mandżurskie” (Tungusic-Manchu languages)¹⁷.

The name we talk about raises also other objections. Its two parts clearly suggest that the languages it refers to are divided into two groups: Manchu and Tungusic. Indeed, the classification of V.I. C i n c i u s assumes this division, but it is not the only classification. V.A. A v r o r i n, for example, divides “Tungusic-Manchu” languages into three groups – northern, western and southern – while other scholars stay with two groups, but give them different names. As the table below (with three attempts at classification) shows, the problem is created by the “middle” languages. Some of the researches are inclined to include them in the “Manchu” group (or southern, western...), others to the “Tungusic” one (northern), and still others see them as a separate group:

V.I. Cincius	V.A. Avrorin	O.P. Sunik
A. Northern group (Tungusic)	A. Northern group	A. Tungusic group
		<i>I. “Evonki” languages</i>
1. Evenki with Negidal and Solon dialects	1. Evenki	1. Evenki (with Solon)
2. Even	2. Negidal	2. Negidal
	3. Solon	3. Even
	4. Even	
B. Southern group (Manchu)	B. Southern group	II. “Nani” languages
1. Nanai with Nanai proper, Sungari, Ulcha and Oroki dialects	1. Nanai	1. Nanai
2. Udehe with Udehe proper and Orochi dialects	2. Ulcha	2. Ulcha
	3. Oroki	3. Oroki
	4. Udehe	4. Udehe
	5. Orochi	5. Orochi
	C. Western group	B. Manchu group
3. Manchu	1. Manchu	1. Manchu
	2. Jurchen	2. Jurchen ¹⁸

¹⁷ Polański K. [red.], *Encyklopedia językoznawstwa ogólnego*, Wrocław, second edition 1999, p. 616.

¹⁸ Table prepared on the basis of O. Sunik *Glagol v tunguso-man'čžurskix yazykax*, Leningrad 1962.

In other words, the debate goes on and the term “Manchu-Tungusic languages” (and similar names) seems to settle the case. *Ergo* – there is no point in insisting on it. And since the term “Manchu languages” is an archaism today, let us adopt the name “Tungusic languages” and, consistently, “Tungusic peoples” or the “Tungus” for their users. This solution – already, as we know, sometimes applied¹⁹ – has advantages: a shorter name is more convenient, sounds better next to the terms “Turkic” and “Mongolic”, and does not imply any internal divisions. Moreover, it is, we might say, neutral. Since, there is no people of this name today (see the table), we can use the name Tungus to refer to many tribes, like for example, the name *Slavs* is used.

¹⁹ As for more recent authors, the name *Tungus* was used by, among others, J. Benzing (*Die tungusischen Sprachen*, Wiesbaden 1955) and D. Sinor (*Langues toungouses*, in: *Les langues du monde*, Paris 1952). As for N. Poppe, he is not always consistent. In his *Introduction to Altaic Linguistics* (Wiesbaden 1965) he prefers the term *Manchu-Tungus languages*, but he also allows the names *Tungusic* and *Tungus*.