

ARE MONGOLIAN AND TUNGUS GENETICALLY RELATED?

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It is no secret that Gerhard Doerfer has argued strongly against a genetic relationship between the Mongolic and Tungusic languages. Ten years ago he presented a detailed analysis of the Mongolo-Tungusic vocabulary (1985). In the following I intend to show that his material allows of a quite different conclusion.¹

Doerfer classifies the Tungusic languages into the following dialectal areas (11f.), from west to east:

- W = Western Evenki,
- E = Eastern Evenki,
- S = Solon (which is close to Eastern Evenki),
- M = Manchu (incl. Jurchen),
- Z = Zentral Tungusic, which comprises Udehe, Oroch, Nanai (incl. Kili), Ulcha, Orok, and Negidal (which is an Eastern Evenki dialect),
- L = Lamut (incl. Arman).

This classification differs sharply from the genetic classification of the Tungusic languages (14), from south to north:²

1. South Tungusic = Manchu (incl. Jurchen),
2. Western Central Tungusic = Nanai (incl. Kili), Ulcha and Orok,
3. Eastern Central Tungusic = Udehe and Oroch,
4. Western North Tungusic = Evenki (incl. Solon and Negidal),
5. Eastern North Tungusic = Lamut (incl. Arman), which is sufficiently close to Evenki to be taken together (fn.16).

It follows that Doerfer's Zentral Tungusic is much more heterogeneous than the other groups. Following the comparative method, we should first try to reconstruct Proto-Evenki, Proto-Nanai, Proto-Udehe and Proto-Manchu before embarking upon a reconstruction of Proto-Tungusic. We may therefore wonder if the Central Tungusic languages (= Zentral Tungusic minus Negidal) behave differently from North and South Tungusic in Doerfer's analysis.

¹ Page numbers will refer to Doerfer 1985 unless indicated otherwise.

² Cf. also Poppe 1965: 26f. and Li 1996: 21ff.

From a chronological point of view, Doerfer distinguishes four categories (13):

- A = Alt,
 N = Neu,
 P = Possibly old,
 U = Undecided.

Since the aim of the present contribution is methodological, I shall not question either the material or the sound laws on the basis of which these categories are established.

Looking at the distribution of Alt and Neu words in Eastern Evenki, Solon, and Manchu, Doerfer arrives at the following ratios (203, 210, 212):³

	Alt	Neu
Eastern Ev.	94 (54%)	77 (46%)
Solon	85 (47%)	97 (53%)
Manchu	82 (39%)	129 (61%)

For Central Tungusic, Doerfer removes the words which are found in both North and South Tungusic from the material and lists those words which are found in either North or South Tungusic only (222f.):⁴

	Alt	Neu
Central Tungusic	34	0
Eastern Central Tg.	10	1
Western Central Tg.	25	15
Orok only	2	3

The high proportion of Alt to Neu words casts grave doubts on Doerfer's thesis that all of them were borrowed from Eastern Evenki, Solon and Manchu at a recent stage (291, 294).

Among the 88 or 90 Central Tungusic words which are found in either North or South Tungusic only, Doerfer adduces eight etyma which were allegedly borrowed twice:

- #28 "Licht, hell werden" from Evenki into Udehe and from Manchu into Kili (21),
 #30 "Magen" from Evenki or Solon into Udehe and from Manchu into Nanai (22),
 #54 "(unter der) Achsel (tragen)" from Manchu into Oroch and from Evenki or Solon into Western CTg. (25),

³ The numbers for Eastern Evenki do not match those in the preceding table (203), where we find A 95 and N 80. In fact, these numbers fit Doerfer's percentages better.

⁴ Here again, there are discrepancies between the numbers in the list and those in the table.

- #61 “Fäden (drehen)” from Manchu into Western CTg. and from Evenki or Solon into both Eastern and Western CTg. (26),
 #122 “umarmen” from Evenki into Udehe and from Manchu into Oroch (52),
 #124 “(einen) Gürtel (spannen)” from Evenki into both Eastern and Western CTg. and recently again into Orok (52),
 #217 “dreißig” from Solon into both Eastern and Western CTg. and from Manchu into Kili and Nanai (79),
 #440 “kühl” from both Solon and Manchu into Nanai (119).

Though Nanai *serun* beside *serguen* ‘cool’ may indeed be a borrowing from Solon, it seems to me that the other items of Doerfer’s list may represent original Tungusic words, as Doerfer admits himself in the case of the word for ‘stomach’ (22).

From a semantic point of view, the 64 etyma of Alt Central Tungusic words with cognates in either North or South Tungusic only can be classified as follows:

- 32 nouns, viz. #5 “Herr”, #6 “Schlinge”, #10 “Rand”, #21 “Rippe”, #23 “Sattel”, #30 “Magen”, #32 “Hammer”, #37 “Espe”, #51 “Pferd”, #72 “Ziege”, #78 “Armband”, #82 “Milz”, #83 “Dachs”, #88 “Dämon”, #105 “Nacken”, #106 “Sack”, #121 “Schachtelhalm” (‘horsetail’), #124 “Gürtel”, #135 “Zügel”, #154 “Sand”, #161 “Daumen”, #211 “Peitsche”, #216 “Schnalle”, #224 “Lid”, #230 “Wildapfel”, #240 “Schwager”, #261 “Bauch”, #387 “Rücken”, #633 “Mehl”, #646 “Dorf”, #651 “Zeit”, #652 “Pelz”.
- 4 nouns or verbs, viz. #28 “Licht, hell werden”, #54 “(unter der) Achsel (tragen)”, #61 “Fäden (drehen)”, #197 “Faust, packen”.
- 9 adjectives, viz. #13 “blind”, #36 “rot”, #118 “flach”, #133 “grün”, #165 “weich”, #409 “weiß”, #417 “passend”, #440 “kühl”, #649 “hell”.
- 2 adverbs, viz. #56 “oben” and #113 “allein”.
- 2 numerals, viz. #217 “dreißig” and #238 “zwanzig”.
- 15 verbs, viz. #2 “kastrieren”, #14 “frieren”, #25 “graben”, #35 “sich drehen”, #38 “übrig bleiben”, #44 “transportieren”, #64 “spinnen”, #111 “erzählen”, #122 “umarmen”, #131 “spalten”, #168 “mischen”, #195 “streifen”, #200 “bedecken”, #219 “geleiten”, #229 “kneten”.

It seems to me that the semantic distribution of these words points to genetic relationship rather than borrowing. In particular, the relatively large number of verbs is difficult to explain under the assumption of borrowing.⁵ Doerfer’s contrary results appear to be an artefact of his methodology. A final judgment can only be reached when a proper comparative analysis of the Central Tungusic languages will have been carried out.

⁵ Cf. Kortlandt 1989 = 1992, also 1995: 105f.

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