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The Russian-Evenki “argot” and its traces in the modern Evenki dialects

Elena Klyachko

Language contact in the circumpolar world

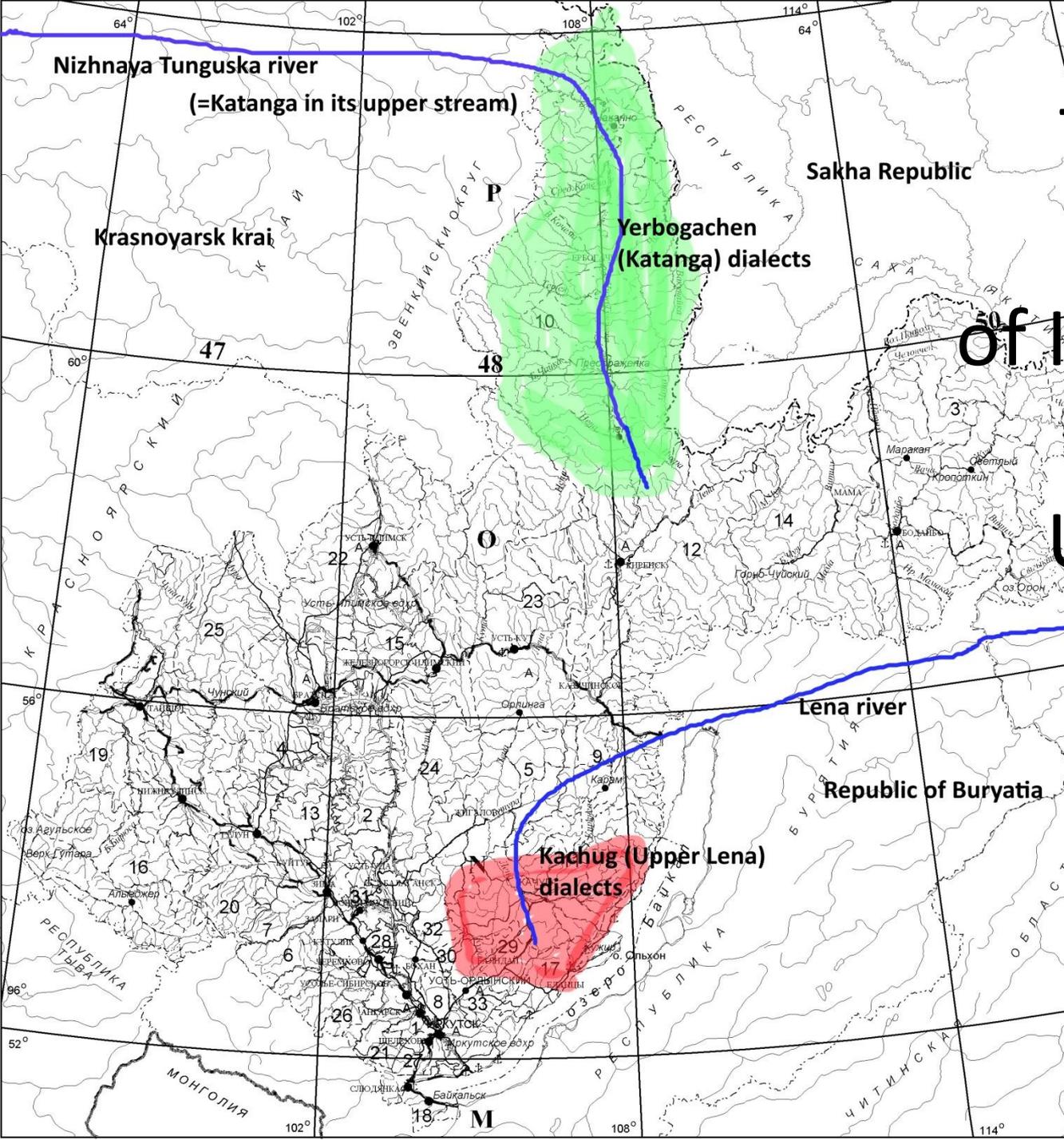
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Evenki dialects

- Occupy a huge territory
- 3 dialect groups:
 - southern
 - northern
 - eastern



The Evenki dialects of Irkutsk oblast: Katanga vs Upper Lena

Upper Lena dialects (Kachug dialect)

- The eastern dialect group
- More endangered than the other dialects of Irkutsk oblast
- A number of lexical borrowings from Buryat
- Unusual grammatical constructions with the imperative form

The Upper Lena dialects in the works of Glafira Vasilevich

- “in the dialects of Tokma and Upper Lena the **personal necessity participle** is disappearing and being replaced by

The Upper Lena dialects according to Vasilevich

Upper Lena	standard	meaning
вес	упкат	'all, whole' (< Russian весь)
ишшо	нян	'more' (< Russian ещё)
тожа	туги	'also' (< Russian тоже)
опет	нян	'again' (< Russian опять)
нисколко	ахун-да, асун-да	'no [quantity]' (< нисколко)
давай депчэкэл	депчэкэл	'eat.imper.2sg' (< Russian 2sg imperative construction)
пушшай нинядягин	нинядягин	'sleep.imper.3sg' (< Russian 3sg imperative construction)
могу дядяп	дядяңа бими	'if I can hide' {???) (< Russian могу 'I can')
самай аякакур	аякакур	'good.super.pl' (< Russian superlative construction)

The Evenki argot as described by Vasilevich

- “The constructions combining a Russian and an Evenki word are characteristic of the Evenks who speak Russian more often...”
- “In the Evenki language, there has appeared a so-called argot which uses Russian words and transformed Evenki words”
- “...the Evenks living not far from trading posts spoke two languages: the Evenki with the Evenks and argot with those who spoke Russian argot...”
- “Both parties must have thought that the collocutor would better understand the argot than the normal forms of the Russian or the Evenki language”

The hypothesis

- The unusual forms in the Evenki dialects of Kachug may be justified not by the recent “direct” influence of the Russian language (i. e. school education, and mass media) but by the influence of the intermediate language, i.e. the argot

Can it be proved?

- Not directly
- but we can compare the Russian borrowings in the dialects whose speakers had more or less contact with the Russians:
 - We expect more “direct” borrowings and more variability in the dialects with less contact
- We can also examine the features of the argot

Who else mentions the argot?

- Vasilevich: texts collected by Anisimov in the Podkamennaya Tunguska region [1936] have a lot of traces of the argot
- I. M. Suslov (the Podkamennaya Tunguska region [1926]) “they spoke the peculiar Angara-Tungus argot” (however, he quotes a Russian text)
- Code-switching in the texts collected by Suslov:

Тут я упала и опять стала **бучо**

Russian borrowings in our corpus

- texts recorded in 1998—2016 in Krasnoyarsk krai, Tomsk oblast, and Irkutsk oblast
- northern dialects > southern dialects > eastern dialects
- ca. 30 000 wordforms
- limited to the borrowings mentioned by Vasilevich and the imperative constructions

How to measure the amount of contact with the Russians

- tried to infer the amount of contact indirectly from the sociolinguistic questionnaires (“Did your grandmother speak Russian?”) but the data is too sparse
- for the time being, try to use the data by Vasilevich

Russian borrowings: no examples found

- раньше ('earlier') (only in code-switching contexts)
- несколько ('no [quantity]')
- the construction with *могу*

Russian borrowings which occur in all dialect groups

- ещё ('more')
- тоже ('also')
- опять ('again')
- pleonastic constructions with давай, пускай (imperative constructions)

Russian borrowings limited to some dialect groups

- вес < весь ('all, whole'): southern dialects only
- надо ('it is necessary') constructions:
different for the northern and the southern dialects
 - more variability for the northern dialects (converbs)
 - the imperative form for the southern dialects (Podkamennaya Tunguska and Kachug)
 - The “pure” Evenki form (necessity participle) not used at all

More about the imperative construction in Kachug

- Used in prospective, temporal and conditional contexts (instead of the prospective forms or the conditional converb -mi)
- Seems not to obey the vowel harmony (-kol for all stems) when not an imperative verb
- Used as a headword for verbs in a dictionary compiled by a native speaker

Similar processes?

- E. Perekhval'skaya argues that the Russian words borrowed into the Mansi language in the imperative form may have been borrowed from the Russian pidgin (where it is the usual form of the verbs)

Conclusions

- The imperative construction in the Kachug dialect is spreading more widely
- It seems to be influenced by the contact with the Russians via some “argot”
- But:
 - we have to systematically explore historical data on the Evenki language
 - we have to better understand the Russian-Evenk contacts

Thank you!