

1996

Body Parts in Mongolian and Uyghur

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Recommended Citation

Schwarz, Henry G., "Body Parts in Mongolian and Uyghur" (1996). *History*. 43.
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Henry G. Schwarz
416 15th Street
Bellingham WA 98225

May 29, 1996

Professor Sh. Bira
Secretary-General
International Association of Mongolian Studies
Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

Dear Professor Bira:

As promised, I am sending you in today's mail my contribution to the special issue of your Bulletin dedicated to Professor Ozawa's seventieth birthday.

With best personal regards,

Sincerely,

Henry G. Schwarz

encl.

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BODY PARTS IN MONGOLIAN AND UYGHUR

Henry G. Schwarz

Although much has been written about Standard Mongolian and Mongolian languages, relatively little attention has been given to their relationship to neighboring languages, particularly those belonging to the Turkic group. The following few lines are intended as a minor contribution to filling this void and to honor Professor Ozawa on his seventieth birthday. They are the product of ruminations by a non-linguist who suspects that linguists might find his remarks naive but nevertheless hopes that these lines might offer a different perspective on the subject.

Lately I have become interested in the extent to which Standard Mongolian¹ and contemporary Uyghur share correspondences. I am mindful of the fact that the best path toward finding such linkages is by studying entire semantic groups, a point made by several linguists, including Professor Tsintsius, who recommended the study of names of animals, names of human body parts, and kinship terms.² Consequently, I chose earlier this year to investigate the category of names for animals and related objects and activities³ and found no fewer than eighty-four correspondences.

Encouraged by this outcome, I chose for the present occasion the category of human body parts.⁴ In addition to identifying correspondences in the two contemporary languages, I decided to test the proposition, frequently advanced by linguists, that correspondences are

1. I use the term as it is used in China, i.e. to designate the official language and orthography in Southern ("Inner") Mongolia.

2. Vera I. Tsintsius, "Zadachi sravnitel'noj leksikologii altajskikh yazykov," *Ocherki sravnitel'noj leksikologii altajskikh yazykov* (Leningrad : Nauka, 1972), 1-2.

3. "Animals in Mongolian and Uyghur," chapter in a volume honoring Professor Cenggeltei's fifty years of scholarship, to be published in Kökeqota in 1997.

4. The primary source for Uyghur was Henry G. Schwarz, *An Uyghur-English Dictionary* (Bellingham : Center for East Asian Studies, Western Washington University, 1992), which, because it lists some 380 Mongolian correspondences, also served as a supplementary source for Mongolian. The primary references for contemporary Mongolian were *Monggol Kitad toli* (Kökeqota : Öbör Monggol-un Arad-un Keblel-ün Qoriy-a, 1977); Secencogtu, *Monggol üges-ün ijagur-un toli* (Kökeqota : Öbör Monggol-un Arad-un Qoriy-a, 1988); Ya. Tsêvêl, *Mongol khêlnij tovch tajlbar tol'* (Ulaanbaatar : Ulsyn Khêvlêlijn Khêrêg Erkhêkh Khoroo, 1966); and *Menggu yuzu yuyan cidian* (Xining : Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 1990).

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likely to be found in greater numbers among languages spoken in areas adjacent to each other, as Nicholas Poppe did some thirty years ago when he pointed to the existence of many Tatar loanwords in Kalmyk.⁵ This proposition led me to investigate two Mongolian languages whose speakers live in close proximity to Uyghur or to a language closely akin to Uyghur. The first and more important of the two is Oirat whose speakers live either amid or adjacent to Uyghurs in Eastern Turkestan, or Xinjiang.⁶ The second language is Eastern Yogur, whose speakers belong to one of several Mongolian groups in China and who live in Gansu's Sunan autonomous county where they are neighbors to the Western Yogurs, sometimes referred to as Yellow Uyghurs, who speak a Turkic language closely akin to contemporary Uyghur.⁷

As for the principal objective, identifying correspondences in Standard Mongolian and contemporary Uyghur, the result was rather disappointing. The dozen examples displayed in Table 1 represent a small portion of the more than sixty words for body parts that I identified in my main sources for Standard Mongolian and Uyghur.⁸

Table 1. Group I of Correspondences.

M	EY	WY	U	
<i>ala</i>	<i>ala</i>		<i>aǵ</i>	'crotch'
<i>alag-a</i>	<i>halagan</i>	<i>haja</i>	<i>alqan</i>	'palm'
<i>bel*</i>		<i>bel</i>	<i>bäl</i>	'waist'
<i>böger-e</i>	<i>by:re</i>		<i>böräk</i>	'kidney'
<i>bulçıñ</i>	<i>xara maga:n</i>		<i>buljuñ</i>	'muscle'
<i>kele</i>	<i>kelen</i>	<i>däl</i>	<i>til</i>	'tongue'
<i>möce</i>			<i>müçä</i>	'limb'
<i>mörü</i>	<i>märä</i>	<i>jiǵan</i>	<i>müra</i>	'shoulder'

5. Nicholas Poppe, *Introduction to Altaic Linguistics* (Wiesbaden : Otto Harrassowitz, 1965), 159.

6. My principal source of information was *Xudum-Todo-igi xaricuuluqsan Monggol keleni toli* (Urumci : Sinjiyang-giyin Aradiyin Kebleliyin Xorô, 1979).

7. For Eastern Yogur, the best sources are *Jegün Yogur kelen-ü üge kekelge-yin materiyal* (Kökeqota : Öbör Monggol-un Arad-un Keblel-iin Qoriy-a, 1988); *Bulucilagu, Jegün Yogur kelen-ü üges*, published by the same publishing house in 1985; and *Jagunnasutu, Dongbu Yugu yu jianzhi* (Beijing : Minzu chubanshe, 1981). For Western Yogur, I relied on Chen Zongzhen, *Xibu Yugu yu jianzhi* (Beijing : Minzu chubanshe, 1985). Perhaps the handiest source for comparing both Yogur languages with Standard Mongolian as well as other Mongolian languages in China (but, strangely enough, not Oirat) is the *Menggu yuzu yuyan cidian* cited in note 3 above.

8. I am, of course, not looking here for some statistical significance. Such endeavor would render its results largely meaningless because the concept of a semantic group is extremely elastic.

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M	EY	WY	U	
<i>saqal</i>	<i>sagal</i>	<i>sagal</i>	<i>saqal</i>	'beard'
<i>tañnai</i>	<i>tañli:</i>		<i>tañlay</i>	'palate'
<i>dabusañ</i>	<i>dawasäg</i>	<i>davasäk</i>	<i>dowsaq</i>	'bladder'
<i>cabi</i>	<i>tsabj</i>		<i>çat</i>	'groin'

M = Standard Mongolian; EY = Eastern Yogur; WY = Western Yogur; U = Uyghur;
 * = now mostly used for 'mountain waist'.

Testing the proposition that any two languages whose speakers live close to each other are likely to have more correspondences than widely separated languages yielded equally meager results. I was unable to find a single correspondence between Oirat and Uyghur in this particular semantic group.⁹ As for the two Yogur languages, only the three

Table 2. Group II of Correspondences.

M	EY	WY	U	
<i>tariki</i>	<i>mä:ñi:</i>	<i>muñe</i>	<i>miñä</i>	'brain'
<i>sormusu</i>	<i>gärbäg</i>	<i>gärmäk</i>	<i>kirpik</i>	'eyelash'
<i>jobki</i>	<i>gadzar</i>		<i>qapaq</i>	'eyelid'

correspondences listed in Table 2 were found. What should be noted here is some apparent borrowing from Western Yogur to Eastern Yogur, or, more broadly speaking, from Turkic to Mongolian.

If this is indeed what has happened, at least three questions spring to mind: when did the borrowing occur, why were words for only these three body parts borrowed, and, as an extension of the second question, what conditions must be present for lexical borrowing to occur. As to the first question, the Eastern Yogurs could have borrowed these terms from the Western Yogurs at any time during the last seven hundred years, because the two groups have been neighbors since at least the end of the Mongol world empire. No more precise dating is possible without much additional research.

It is even more difficult to arrive at any satisfactory answer to the second question of why the Turkic words for these three particular body parts were apparently borrowed by the Mongolian-speaking Eastern Yogurs. The surprise is not so much that words of only three body parts were involved, but that *any* apparent loan words for body parts were found. It is highly improbable that any group, living at that time and place, did not have its own terms for body parts, and thus I am not certain how to explain Table 2. Possible explanations include errors in my sources, my misinterpretation of these sources, and the chance that these borrowings occurred accidentally.

9. Several spot checks seem to suggest, however, that there are correspondences in other semantic groups. This is clearly a problem in need of scholarly attention.

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This surmise leads to the broader question of when one might expect borrowing to occur. As a working hypothesis, I would suggest two conditions. One is when one group is dominant, perhaps numerically but much more importantly in terms of power and hence prestige. The other condition is when one group has a relatively underdeveloped lexicon. As already posited, this condition is not likely to obtain for such basic semantic groups as body parts, but it is definitely a factor in such fields as technology and administration. Obviously when these two conditions coincide, one would expect the incidence of lexical borrowing to be markedly higher.¹⁰

The most appropriate examples of borrowing under these conditions are the numerous Chinese and Russian loanwords in contemporary Mongolian and Uyghur. Uyghur still has some Russian loanwords but far fewer than thirty years ago when, largely caused by political factors, Russian influence in Eastern Turkestan was virtually eliminated. For rather similar reasons, the incidence of Russian loanwords in the Mongolian language of Northern Mongolia is being diminished. Furthermore, Chinese loanwords are quite expectedly more numerous in Southern ("Inner") Mongolia than in Northern Mongolia. These examples seem to suggest a positive correlation between the degree of one group's being dominated and the extent to which it engages in lexical borrowing. They also seem to give credence to the notion that the closer two linguistic communities live to each other, the more borrowing one is apt to encounter. It may, however, come as a surprise to someone only familiar with the linguistic situation in Southern Mongolia to learn that the Mongolian language there has far fewer Chinese loanwords than Uyghur, even though the Chinese dominance, numerical and otherwise, is far greater there than in Eastern Turkestan.

The conclusion one might draw from this is not that the proposition, as originally stated, is false but that it is only partially correct. As just demonstrated, its emphasis on propinquity turns out to be inappropriate when applied to contemporary Mongolian and Uyghur. One should rather concentrate on several other factors, among them relative perceived power and the historical record. Indeed, with regard to the latter factor, many Uyghur intellectuals have told me that in this century, they have borrowed quite freely, first from Russian and then from Chinese because earlier Uyghur had absorbed huge numbers of Arabic and Persian words, and some accounts still speak of well over half of the present Uyghur lexicon being of West Asian derivation. It is a persuasive argument, and it invites a reexamination of the belief held by many linguists that, like Uyghur, Mongolian had also absorbed large numbers of foreign words.¹¹ This investigation, however, will have to wait until another time.

10. Under these conditions, borrowing is also likely to occur in many other fields of human activity.

11. For example, Poppe, *ibid.*, avers that "about twenty-five per cent of the Mongolian vocabulary is of Turkic origin."