

ON TEMPO DIVERGENCES IN MONGOLIAN LANGUAGES

TAMARA YESENOVA

Philological Department
Kalmyk State University
Elista, Kalmykia, USSR, 358000

ABSTRACT

The phonetic divergences in the structure of modern mongolian languages have long been attracting the attention of scholars. Despite a great interest in Mongolian phonetics, the problem of reasons of sound alteration in Mongolian word is still very actual. There's an opinion, expressed by V.I.Rassadin following B.Y.Vladimirtsov that the modification of phonemic aspect of Mongolian word was influenced by the general weakening of the articulation.

INTRODUCTION

The Mongolian languages, being in a foreign environment, have been greatly influenced by the languages in contact (Russian, Chinese, Turkic, Tunguso-Manchurian). Thus, for example, the change of h<s, the monotony, the slowing down of the speech tempo are regarded to be the result of long-term contacts of Buryats with Evenks. The language of the Mongols of Inner Mongolia, who had lived in the Chinese surrounding for a long time, has undergone profound structural changes. A.D.Rudnev first noted that the language of East Mongols remains Mongolian, but the intonation, its

rhythm and tempo, i.e. the external aspect of speech reminds that of Chinese /1/. In the study of the phonetic divergences of mongolian languages they do not take into consideration the prosodic data which, in our opinion, promoted their appearance.

The tempo of speech most frequently distinguished by the scientists is the prosodic difference of Mongolian dialects. A.D. Rudnev was the first to pay attention to it by saying: "of all the Mongolian tribes known to me the Buryats speak most slowly"/1/. Among Mongolian languages the literary Buryat language is singled out as a language where the non-first syllable vowels are the most distinct ones. But the dialectological material shows that the process of reduction involves most of the Buryat dialects, though the degree of reduction is not as strong as in the Kalmyk or Khalkha-Mongolian. The Mongolian scholar E.Vandue who studied the Derbet dialect refers to the slow speech tempo of Derbets, as compared with that of Khalkha /2/. B.Y.Vladimirtsov also pointed out the divergences in the dialects of the Volga Derbets and those of

Kobdoss./3/.

The experimental data showed that the average duration of the consonant in the Buryat language is 150-198 ms; of a short vowel - 100ms; of a long vowel 133-205ms /4/. The average statistic duration of the sound in Kalmyk according to our data is 88ms. Thus, the difference is essential. The Kalmyk dialects are characterized by the most fluent tempo in comparison with the speech tempo of other Mongolian dialects. But they are also discriminated on the basis of this significant prosodic feature which is the most important condition of formation of oral speech. The quick speech tempo is inherent to all Kalmyk dialects, it is illustrated by the data given below on the tempo of articulation of sounds in 2 basic Kalmyk dialects: the average duration of the sound in Torgut dialect is 81,9ms, in Derbet - 87,2ms. Having a general fluent tempo of speech the Torgut dialect displays the smallest average duration of the sound, i.e. the tempo of speech is the highest. The consistent divergence in the average duration of the sound in the dialects is observed in all intonation types of sentences. Thus, the average duration of the sound in the final intonation without accentuation makes 81,4ms within Torgut dialect and 88,3ms in Derbet; in the final intonation with accentuation - 80,1ms, 81,4ms. The longest duration is due to the falling melody, and the shortest - to the rising melody.

However, the analysis of the distribution of these duration figures points out within the Kalmyk phrase that the tempo alteration is observed throughout the whole sentence. While the tempo of pronunciation of the initial syllables in the phrases pronounced with the falling and rising melody is relatively the same. The final syllables are pronounced with divergences, the rising melody is accompanied by increasing of the sound duration of the final syllables in the phrase. The sound of intermediate syllables of the phrase in the first and the second melody types are characterized by the relatively slow duration i.e. its peculiar of them to quicken the tempo of pronunciation.

Compare: the average relative duration of the sound in the final melody at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the sentence is 2,01-1,86-1,92; in the rising 2,01-1,85-2,32 respectively.

As it was noted more than once the temporal characteristics singles out the informatively significant components of the phrase. The Kalmyk language, alongside with other Mongolian languages, is characterized by the fixed word-order in the sentence where the predicate is in the final position.

However, in some styles of literary Mongolian language the inversion of parts of the sentences is perceived as a fact of normalisation and legalisation of a more free word order in general /5/. As a rule,

parts of phrases singled out by the tempo correspond to the rheme. Informatively less significant parts of the phrase are pronounced in a higher tempo, which results in modification of the phonemic aspect of words and sometimes even in sound elimination. As for the structure of the word itself this tendency embraces all its elements. The modification of phonemic structure of Mongolian word is a thoroughly investigated aspect in literature: the development of long vowels owing to the weakening and disappearance of intervocal consonants, sporadic falling out of sonorants, vowel reduction in a weak position are observed in all Mongolian languages, The Khalkha-Mongolian is closer to the Kalmyk on the degree of reduction. We observe the complete disappearance of short vowels in speech, the degree of reduction depends on the tempo of speech; the higher the tempo, the stronger the reduction. It is exactly this peculiarity that is responsible for typical phonetic mistakes in the Russian speech of the Mongol speaking people who haven't quite mastered the literary pronunciation. Thus, for example, one of the marked peculiarities is the elipsis of non-first syllable vowels; МАММ-НА-МАММН, РАССА-РАСС, НАРТА-НАРТ and etc. It is so consistent that it is frequently reflected in written speech. In the Khalkha-Mongolian language not only separate vowels, but very often the final syllable of the word is reduced completely. If in

the Kalmyk and Buryat languages the final consonant "n" which is the morphological feature of the noun is preserved when the preceding vowel falls out, in the Khalkha language it consistently falls out too. The reduction of vowels lowers down the vocalic factor and the consonantal saturation of the word. The quickening of the speech tempo results in carelessness, indistinctness in the articulation of sounds. It changes the correlation of occlusives and constrictives to a great extent and frequently leads to spirantisation of occlusives and sometimes to their total disappearance (especially unstable is the medio-lingual constrictive <j>), simplification of the groups of consonants due to the falling out of the consonants between the voiced, devoicing of the voiced, the falling out of the constrictives. Thus, in the Buryat dialects the forelingual occlusive <n> changes into medio-lingual constrictive <j> and it's characteristic of Sard-Kalmyks to change the soft constrictive forelingual <l'> by the soft constrictive medio-lingual <j>. The original phonemic structure of Mongol word is changed due to simplification of articulation. The appearance of these changes is sufficiently substantiated by V.Y. Vladimirtsov when he speaks of All-Mongolian tendency of weakening the tension of articulation the basis of which is the phonetic law of economising the articulation efforts. In his "Comparative Grammar of the Mongolian

Written Language and the Khalkha Dialect" he wrote that the long final vowels in Khalkha words are weaker and more open than the long initials and the middle vowels. They are still more weakened at the absolute end of the utterance and before the pauses./3/. The economy of pronouncing efforts is carried out mainly due to falling out of sounds and vowel reduction. And these in their turn account for the reconstruction of the consonantal chain of the words. The vowels of the first syllable turned out to be untouched by the reduction as they are characterized by distinct articulation which is accounted for by their place in the word: the beginning is stronger than the end. Besides, it's required by their role in forming the vocalism of the word as they determine the vocalic structure of a vowel harmonised word. The progressive assimilation according to the vowel serie of the first syllable of the word is characteristic of all Mongolian languages. Based on the accuracy, on the distinction of pronunciation, on the vivid manifestation of all differential features of this vowel, many scholars speak of its accentuated character.

Thus, most modifications in the phonetic aspect of the word are explained by the weakening of tension of organs of speech, sponsoring inaccurate articulation. This tendency is redoubled by the quickening of the speech tempo, which is characteristic to Mongolian languages, but to a greater

extent-to Kalmyk language and its dialects. If for the appearance of these modifications the maximum favourable position is the middle of the word, but in a phrase - the communicatively less important elements. However, with the general tendency towards the reduction of the sounds which do not belong to the first syllables in the definite phonetic positions the duration of vowels with inaccurate articulation proves to be high (in some cases - to 70ms). In revealing the reasons of the appearance of innovations and the preservation of all its general features in the Mongolian languages it's necessary to take into account the prosodic data, such as, for example, the general speeding up of speech, the status of strong and weak elements of the phrase. Due to it the elements which are exactly in these positions undergo these changes.

- /1/ A.Rudnev, "Materials of the dialects of East Mongolia", Sant-Peterburg, 1911.
- /2/ E. Vandue, "The derbet dialect", Ulan-Bator, 1976.
- /3/ B.Vladimirtsov, "Comparative grammar of mongolian written language and khalkha dialect", Leningrad, 1929.
- /4/ M.Mokhosoeva, "Intonation of question-answer sentences of the buryat language", Ulan-Ude, 1981.
- /5/ G.Purveev, "On innovations in the sentence Syntex of mongolian", Problems of linguistics, 1977, 5.