

MAREK STACHOWSKI
Jagiellonian University in Kraków
stachowski.marek@gmail.com

TWO POLISH LOANWORDS IN YAKUT (‘SNUFF [TOBACCO]’; ‘THOUSAND’), BEING ALSO A LOOK AT THEIR REFLEXES IN SOME OTHER SIBERIAN LANGUAGES AS WELL AS IN RUSSIAN

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Abstract

The Polish origin of the Yakut word for ‘snuff’ was suggested some years ago but a closer look at this word nest reveals new and rather unclear aspects. The other word to be discussed here is that for ‘thousand’; its Russian origin is doubted by this author because of phonetic inaccuracies which can be well removed once a Polish etymon of the Yakut word is accepted.

1. Historical aspects

The oldest known mention of Polish prisoners exiled by Russian authorities to Siberia is dated to 1608 (Armon 1977: 17). Exile to Siberia as penalty or preventive measure continued to be executed in Russia even in the 20th century. The number of Polish exiles in the 19th century alone was estimated to be more than a million. Not all of them were located in Yakutia of course. Nevertheless, Bibikov, the mayor of Yakutsk in the years 1678–1681, divided the whole town into four districts and dedicated one of them to Poles and some other exiles (Armon 1977: 22) which well displays the proportion between Poles and other nations in then Yakutia. The number of Poles in villages was probably even greater since only a small proportion of Polish exiles were allowed to live in Yakutsk while most were directed to villages.

It was especially those settled in villages who had to learn Yakut and generally tended to establish the best possible contact with the Yakut population in their vicinity. Two reasons for their attitude can easily be found. They usually were students and, thus, not in a position to survive in Siberia alone, that is without help of the natives. Secondly, they more often than not felt ideologically attached to social and peasant movements which very well explains their warm feelings towards the common people of any nation.

It would be somewhat amazing, indeed, if no word borrowing process from Polish into Yakut had come into being in this situation, even if it was actually the Poles who had to learn Yakut than the other way round.

2. 'Snuff [tobacco]'

One such loanword was found some time ago. It is Yakut *pruoška* ~ *boruoska* '1. snuff [tobacco]; 2. penis of a baby' = Indigirka Russian 'proška 'snuff [tobacco]' < Polish *proszka*, gen. sg. < *proszek* 'powder' (Anikin 1997: 477). The etymology seems to require some additional explanation.

The baffling Yakut phonetic shape *pruoška* (attested in Piekarskij's dictionary) displays three features impossible in that language: Yakut has no *š* among its consonants and it does not allow, in word-initial position, either of consonant clusters or of the voiceless *p-*. Thus, the form *pruoška*, evidently being a Slavonic-Yakut hybrid, will probably have been used either by a Yakut who, at least partially, spoke Russian or Polish or else by a Slav who spoke Yakut.

In any case, the word is Polish, not Russian, because of two phonetic features: the Polish *pro-*anlaut (vs. Russian *poro-*) and a trace of the Polish accent 'proszka' (vs. Russian *poroška*) that can be seen in form of the Yakut diphthong *-uo-* (< **-ō-* < accented *-o-*).

The Polish word *proszek* '1. powder; 2. pill [pharmacy]' has, as a matter of fact, two genitive forms: *proszk-u* used in any meaning, and *proszk-a*, generally only used in the sense of 'pill', at least in today's literary norm. In our case, however, one is forced to accept a conjecture of a colloquial or, maybe, dialectal use of the genitive *proszk-a* also with the meaning 'powder'.

There is nothing extraordinarily shocking about borrowing a Slavonic genitive form rather than a nominative because the Slavonic genitive of quantity is regularly combined with words like 'a little', 'a few', 'much', 'a lot, lots of', 'a half of' as well as with some numerals so that it can be heard very often, certainly more often than the nominative.

The somewhat peculiar semantic evolution from Polish 'powder' to Yakut 'penis of a baby' can well be explained by the fact that urine drops on a baby's penis were smelled in order to diagnose the state of health of the baby. Thus, the observed behavioural similarity (putting one's nose closer to a *pruoška*) made possible the change of 'powder' first into 'snuff' and then into 'baby's penis'.

Anikin must have hesitated about the genetical proportion of the Yakut and the Indigirka Russian words. In his dictionary of Siberian loanwords in Russian he does not precisely settle the borrowing channel and direction, rather limiting himself to stating their general etymological identity (Anikin 1997: 477). Later, in his dictionary of Russian loanwords in the Siberian languages he unequivocally says the Yakut word comes from North Russian dialectal *'proška* which is, in turn, a reflex of Polish *proszka*, gen. < *proszek* (Anikin 2003: 489). While this seems quite reasonable, nevertheless I cannot see why the direction of borrowing should be as stated. I think it could have also been the opposite: (Polish *proszka* >) Yakut *pruoška* > North Russian *'proška*.

Besides, Anikin (2003: 489) is absolutely right when he suggests that there is no inevitable need to connect the Evenki word *porōška* 'snuff' with Russian *porošok*, even if he does not justify his opinion. The Evenki word can easily be explained as an anaptyxis reflex of both Polish *proszka* and North Russian *'proška* because Evenki does not allow of word-initial consonant clusters either. Whether the literary Russian shape *porošok*, if it was indeed known to the older Evenki, accelerated the anaptyxis process or not remains undecided.

All in all, the best solution seems to be that the Yakut word *pruoška* was borrowed from the Polish genitive *proszka*, Yakut *boruoska* probably results either from an anaptyxis process of Yakut **bruoska* (< **brōska* < Polish *proszka*) or from a contamination of Yakut *pruoška* ~ **bruoska* with a reflex of Russian *poroška* while the Indigirka Russian *'proška* can be either a Polish or a Yakut loanword, the Polish possibility being more realistic because of its phonetic and semantic similarity.

3. 'Thousand'

Let us now turn to another Polish loanword in Yakut, namely the Yakut numeral *tyhynča* 'thousand'. The word is generally considered to be of Russian origin but the problem actually appears to be somewhat more complex.

The Yakut phonetic variants adduced by Anikin (2003: 625) from various sources are as follows (all <VsV> sequences are changed into <VhV>, according to the modern standardized Yakut spelling): *tyhynča* (being the modern literary form) = dialectal or old: *tȳhynča*, *tyahynča*, *tyhynča*, *čyhynča*, *tyhyčča* (Anikin 2003: 625) = 19th century Yakut, as attested in the 1898 Yakut translation of the New Testament: *tȳhačča* (Stachowski 1995: 38 s.v. <ȳsačča>).

The *a* ~ *y* alternation, being a frequent phenomenon in Turkic, can also be observed in the word-internal syllable here. This difference is typical of Yakut as a Turkic language and cannot therefore be used as a trait pointing to the original sounding of the etymon. The decisive elements in this respect are the vowel length and the consonant *-n-*.

Since accented Slavonic vowels are rendered as long vowels or, sometimes, diphthongs in Yakut the variants *tȳhynča* and *tyahynča* seem to fit the Russian word *tysjača* 'thousand' quite well, as far as the vowels are concerned. However, the emergence

of *-n-* cannot be appropriately interpreted. It is true that Yakut badly tolerates intervocalic voiceless consonants and tends to either sonorize or geminate them. Because there is no voiced *ž* in Yakut, only gemination was a possibility in this case. That is a good explanation of the Yakut *-čč-* but a change of *-čč-* into *-nč-* does not occur in other words and, thus, no analogy is at our disposal. That is why the *-n-* in *tȳhynča* and *tyahynča* cannot be explained from a Russian source.

Anikin (2003: 625) was also aware of the problem because he suggested a possible methathesis of (Russian >) Yakut *tȳhynča* > *tyhȳnča*. Unfortunately, Slepcev (1964: 120sq.) does not know a single case of the metathesis of accented and unaccented vowels. Besides, Anikin (2003: 625) also speaks of a possible assimilation of *-nč-* > *-čč-* but he does not say why this *-n-* emerged in Yakut reflexes of the Russian etymon *'tysjača* without *-n-*.

The Polish word for 'thousand' is *tysiąc* [tɨ'sɔntɕ], gen.sg. *tysiąca* [tɨ'sɔntɕa] (cf. *pół tysiąca* 'half a thousand'), nom.pl. *tysiące* [tɨ'sɔntɕe]. In addition, in careless and dialectal Polish pronunciation, variants with a closer vowel: [-sɔn-] ~ [-sɨn-] can also be heard. Any of the oblique forms (*tysiąca*; *tysiące*) can be reasonably used to explain both the long vowel in the penultimate syllable and the *-nč-* group in the Yakut words. Thus, I would like to suggest the following four etymological groups:

- I. Yak.lit. *tyhȳnča* < Pol. gen.sg. *tysiąca* or nom.pl. *tysiące*. – The genitive singular form is used every time a part of a thousand should be expressed, e.g. *pół* 'half' / *ćwierć* 'a quarter' / *część* 'part' / *procent* 'percent' + *tysiąca*.
- II. Yakut (Bible) *tȳhačča* < Russian *'tysjača*.
- III. Yakut *tȳhynča* and *tyahynča* most probably result from contamination of groups I and II.
- IV. Variants with solely short vowels (*tyhynča*, *čyhynča*, *tyhyčča*) are possibly nothing but erroneous spelling – a very frequent phenomenon in notations made by Slavs who, if not specially trained, are rather indifferent to vowel length.

Anikin (2003: 625) also adduces a Tofalar word *tīšičči* ~ *tīšínči* 'thousand'. It may admittedly be viewed as a follow-up form of Yakut *tȳhačča* ~ *tȳhyčča* (noted <tyhyčča>) but their phonetic dissimilarity prompts me to think of another Polish etymon, namely the genitive plural form *tysięcy* [tɨ'sɛntɕi] whose frequency is extremely high because it stands regularly after numerals 5–21, 25–31, 35–41 and so on *ad infinitum*.

As far as the phonetics is concerned allowance should be made for the fact that the careless and dialectal pronunciation of the Polish word can display a narrow [e] in lieu of the wide [ɛ] in the word-internal syllable, that is [-sɛn-] ~ [-sɨn-] which makes its rendering in Tofalar as *-i-* even easier to explain.

On the other hand, however, the long vowel in the initial syllable argues against a direct borrowing from Polish while deriving this Tofalar word from Yakut requires explaining the distinct vowel in the final syllable. Actually, the only certain thing is that deriving the Tofalar word from Russian *'tysjača* is still less reliable than assuming a Polish or a Yakut etymon.

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