

The Turkic Dukha of Northern Mongolia: Notes on Reindeer Terminology

The Dukhan people are a Turkic-speaking nomadic group inhabiting the northernmost regions of Mongolia's Khövsgöl region. This area borders on the northeast with Buryatia and on the west with the Tuvan republic. Dukhan is nowadays spoken by approximately 500 people: around 32 families are reindeer herders in the surrounding taiga areas. They are divided into two groups: those of the "West Taiga" (*bariin dayga*) originate from Tere Khöl, whereas those of the "East Taiga" (*jüün dayga*) came from Toju; both regions are in present-day Tuva. The remaining families have settled down in the village of Tsagaan Nuur and in neighbouring river areas, where they raise the traditional livestock of Mongolia, i.e., horse, camel, ox, sheep and goat. Linguistically, the Dukhan variety belongs to the Taiga subgroup of Sayan Turkic together with Tofan, the Toju variety of Tuvan and some varieties of the Tere-Khöl area as well as Soyot of Buryatia. Reindeer-breeding and hunting characterized the lifestyle of these groups. Nowadays, this type of lifestyle is only followed by the above-mentioned 32 Dukhan families and a small number of Toju-Tuvans. Also Tofan traditionally lived as reindeer breeders and hunters but nowadays most have settled down in villages.

The present talk will focus on reindeer terminology, a rather unique semantic field within Turkic. Dukhan data will be presented both from a Sayan-Turkic and a Siberian perspective.

References

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