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Reviews

Juha Janhunen: Review of Arienne M. Dwyer, *Salar: A study in Inner Asian language contact processes. Part 1: Phonology*. (Turcologica 37,1.) Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007. xv + 336 pp. ISSN 0177-4743, ISBN 978-3-447-04091-4.

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Originally presented as a doctoral dissertation in 1996 (University of Washington) and scheduled to appear in book form in 2000, this long-awaited work was at last published, in updated form, in 2007. The volume is based on Arienne Dwyer's extensive field work among Salar speakers in the 15-year period between 1991 and 2006. Unfortunately, it still remains only the first of a set of two planned volumes, which together, it is hoped, will ultimately constitute the most comprehensive modern reference tool on the Salar language. After the grammar of Ė. R. Tenishev (1976), this is the first major contribution to Salar studies.

Salar has long remained one of the most insufficiently known Turkic languages, spoken by a relatively small population comprising perhaps only 50,000 (by even the most positive estimate no more than 70,000) people in the remote Sino-Tibetan border region also known as Amdo. The largest concentration of Salar speakers is within Xunhua Salar Autonomous County of Qinghai Province, located at a section of the Upper Yellow River in an ethnic environment dominated by Amdo Tibetans and Chinese Moslems (Dungans or *Huihui*). Due to secondary migrations, there are also Salar communities in Xinjiang, especially in the Yili region, which, importantly, were also covered by Dwyer's field work.

Both the ethnic origin of the Salar speakers and the taxonomic position of Salar among the Turkic languages remain unsolved issues, and Dwyer's discussion of this topic (pp. 1-25, 32-68) offers no definitive conclusion, though she supports the idea of an 'archaic' Western Turkic origin with Northern and Eastern Turkic influences. In any case, it is obvious that the Salar are one of the small displaced Turkic and Mongolic populations that remain in the Amdo region as relicts of the Mongol empire (13th to 15th centuries). Not surprisingly, during some 600 years of isolation, the Salar language has become one of the most aberrant forms of Common Turkic.

Indeed, the question as to what the original taxonomic position of Salar may have been is almost irrelevant given how much the language has changed from contact with the local non-Turkic languages, including Hezhou Mandarin, Amdo Ti-

betan, and, historically, Mongolic. Traditionally, many Salar speakers are traders who are more or less fluent in the languages of their trading partners. Even today, many Salar speakers, especially males, are trilingual in Salar, Amdo Tibetan and Hezhou Mandarin. On the other hand, the Salar live in some of the least 'developed' parts of China, with extremely low levels of income and literacy, a situation that has favoured the preservation of the native language and culture.

After discussing Salar history and culture (pp. 1-25), full of religious fundamentalism, tribal feuds, and rebellions nourished by controversies between the different 'orders' of Islam, Dwyer presents an overview of Salar linguistic history (pp. 26-68), as well as dialectology and history of research (pp. 69-94), after which follows the main part of the book, devoted to phonology (pp. 94-308). The volume concludes with a comprehensive bibliography of all previous scholarship on the Salar language (pp. 309-326). The forthcoming second volume will apparently deal with morphology and syntax, and until it is published the work remains incomplete.

From the point of view of interlingual intelligibility, Salar is, together with Chuvash, Yakut, and Sarygh Yughur, one of the most idiosyncratic Turkic languages. When discussing this issue (pp. 26-32) Dwyer slightly overemphasizes the impact of geography, as opposed to chronology. Chuvash and Sarygh Yughur, for instance, which Dwyer mentions as two 'isolated' Turkic languages, are mutually no less unintelligible than Chuvash and Tatar. Clearly, it is not so much the geographical distance as the chronological separation that makes languages different.

Even so, it is clear that the idiosyncracies of Salar are due to an exceptionally rapid speed of evolution, a property shared by the other, mostly non-Turkic, languages of the Amdo region. The region is a laboratory of language contact, for many diachronic developments are shared across language borders. For instance, the Salar spirantization of initial **b* to *w* can hardly be separated from the similar development in Amdo Tibetan and certain forms of local Mongolic. The same is likely true of the loss of syllable-final **r*, a common trend in many Amdo Tibetan 'farmer' dialects, and also in certain forms of local Mongolic. For such areally conditioned phenomena it is unnecessary to look for more distant parallels in other branches of Turkic, such as Uighur or Oghuz.

The coexistence of different language families in a region often produces puzzling cases of material convergence. For instance, as Dwyer correctly notes (p. 62 note 38), the Salar accusative ending *-nI* is formally identical to the connective (genitive-accusative) ending **-ni* as attested in all the Mongolic languages of the region. In the pronouns (p. 64-65), there are parallels such as Salar [Gala] 'where/whither' = Santa [q^hala] = Bonan [hala] ~ [hali] = Wutun [ali] id. These are not simple borrowings, and, indeed, it seems that more often than by 'copying', adjacent languages somehow produce similar results from their own material resources.

As far as the phonological apparatus is concerned, Dwyer follows a conservative approach, as is common in Altaic studies, the focus being on the non-technical aspects of phonetics and diachrony, rather than on systematic synchronic phonology.

In principle, Dwyer distinguishes phonemes ('underlying inventory') from allophones ('surface inventory'), but in practice these levels are vaguely defined. Often, the 'phonemic' sequences actually seem to be morphophonemic representations and/or diachronic reconstructions. For instance, the phonetic transcriptions [tulu'yu] ~ [tiulu'yu] 'fox' are 'phonemized' (p. 149) as /tylge/, which cannot be synchronically correct. Similar examples abound in the work, which makes several chapters, such as the one on syllable structure and prosody (pp. 139-162), somewhat difficult to digest.

Dwyer is also rather diffuse about the dialectal differences at the phonological level. Although she lists two main 'dialects' (Amdo vs. Yili) and several 'vernaculars' (pp. 77-86), she minimizes dialectal information in the actual phonological description. Since there is much segmental variation in Salar at the phonetic and phonemic levels, and in the data quoted by Dwyer, it is not always clear to the reader when this variation is conditioned by idiolectal factors, and when it is connected with true regional differences. There also seem to be significant generational differences in Salar. For instance, the vowel paradigm is being simplified from eight to six to five (?) vowels in the speech of younger individuals, with further implications for vowel phonotactics. Dwyer does not implicate the specific age groups and localities that have a particular vowel system.

In this connection, the choice of the IPA system for the rendering of the phonemic sequences of Salar may also be criticized. The IPA may be fine when phonetic distinctions (at a rather rough allophonic level) are to be indicated, but it is an awkward and often misleading choice when it comes to phonemic notation. In the Salar case, the language could easily be transcribed by using either the Chinese *pinyin* system, as has been done in some Salar text publications before, or an adaptation of the Turkish Roman orthography, as also used today for several Central Asian Turkic languages. Due to the closeness of Salar phonology to local Chinese, the *pinyin* system would be the best option.

The emphasis on phonetics also results in Dwyer occasionally discussing in unnecessary length trivial detail with little phonological importance; two examples are the strength correlation of the obstruents (pp. 98-108) and the preaspiration of postvocalic strong obstruents (pp. 191-201). Both phenomena have a shallow areal background and do not interfere with the actual phonemic sequences, nor with the segmental correspondences between Salar and the other Turkic languages. Ultimately, it is a question of different phonetic ways that retain the same original strength correlation: it can be supported either by voice (unvoiced vs. voiced) or by aspiration (aspirated vs. unaspirated), or by both, and the aspiration, if present, can both precede (preaspiration) and/or follow (postaspiration) the obstruent segment.

For purposes of comparative Turkology, the most important part of Dwyer's book is the lengthy chapter on diachrony (pp. 202-301). After initially touching upon the interesting question concerning the asymmetry of the Proto-Turkic subparadigm of stops (pp. 205-208), though with no substantial new insights, Dwyer goes on to list the diachronic sources of the Salar phonemes, considering both the