Eugénie Stapert

Contact-induced change in Dolgan

an investigation into the role of linguistic data
for the reconstruction of a people's (pre)history

Among the indigenous peoples of Siberia, the Dolgans occupy a special position. While most ethno-linguistic groups have a longstanding history and a clear ethnic and linguistic affiliation, the formation of the Dolgans has been a relatively recent development, and their ethnic origins as well as their linguistic affiliation have been a matter of debate. According to some scholars, the Dolgans, who inhabit the Taimyr Peninsula and the Anabar district of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), are Turkic people who adopted a Tungusic name and certain Tungusic cultural features. Others hold the view that they have Tungusic origins but shifted to a Turkic language. Migrations and frequent contacts with other ethnic groups complicate a reconstruction of their past.

This study explores the role of linguistic data in the reconstruction of Dolgan (pre)history. Accepting the idea that contact settings may correlate with linguistic outcomes, contact-induced changes in Dolgan are analysed and used to infer information about the nature of the contact settings in which they occurred. The linguistic conclusions are interpreted in a multidisciplinary context, integrating insights from history, ethnography as well as from population genetics. In particular, linguistic patterns of contact influence are correlated with genetic admixture patterns, providing new insights into the prehistoric migration patterns of the Dolgans. Due to its holistic approach, this study provides an example of the innovative ways in which data from different disciplines can be combined to gain a deeper understanding of a people's past and identity, and provides a valuable contribution to the investigation of Siberian history.

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