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On the origin of Uilta (Orok) ***nōni*** ‘he or she’

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The Manchu-Tungusic language family consists of two primary branches: the first one (southern branch) includes Sibe, almost extinct Manchu and extinct Jurchen, to the second one (northern branch) belong the rest (Evenki, Even, extinct Arman, almost extinct Negidal, Solon, extinct or almost extinct Oroch, Udihe (close to extinction), Nanai, Ulch, almost extinct Uilta). So-called Kur-Urmi Nanai dialect (Kili) and Hezhe are probably mixed languages which are close to extinction, too (in general the Manchu-Tungusic language family can be characterized as an endangered one). The northern branch can be divided into two secondary branches: the first one includes Evenki, Even, Arman, Negidal, Solon, Oroch, Udihe; the second one includes Nanai, Ulch, Uilta. In its turn the former secondary branch comprises two smaller branches, one of them includes Oroch and Udihe, the other — Evenki, Even, Arman, Negidal, and Solon.

The 3rd person pronouns in the primary branches are different by origin.

In the southern branch two personal pronouns are attested: Manchu ***i*** ‘he or she’ [1] (in Jurchen materials it is found only in genitive: ***ini***) and Manchu ***čə*** ‘they’ (the Jurchen materials lack such pronoun but in reality it probably existed). It is necessary to stress that personal pronouns like Manchu ***i*** ‘he or she’ and ***čə*** ‘they’ are attested only in the southern branch, any cognates of these pronouns in the rest of contemporary Manchu-Tungusic languages are not found.

The Manchu pronoun ***i*** ‘he or she’ corresponds with Mongolic ****i*** ‘he or she’ which is attested in oblique case forms only, e.g. in Written Mongol ***inu*** (genitive), ***imadur*** (dative-locative). W. Kotwicz assumed that not only Manchu ***i*** ‘he’ but also Manchu ***čə*** ‘they’ were borrowed from Mongolic [Kotwicz 1936: 56-61; Kotwicz 1962: 151].

A. F. Bojtsova was the first who suggested an idea that “... possessive suffixes of the 3rd person plural in Manchu-Tungusic languages (Evenki ***-tin***, Even ***-tan, -tən***, Negidal ***-tin***, Udihe ***-ti***, Nanai ***-či***) trace back to a personal pronoun which taking into consideration the Nanai form ***-či*** could be compared with Manchu ***čə***” [Boitsova 1940: 123].

The Manchu pronoun ***čə*** ‘they’ may be reconstructed as ****čiə*** < ****tiə***, cf. Manchu ***bə*** ‘we (exclusive)’ (< ****buə***) and ***suə*** ‘you (pl.)’ (“the diphthongs ***ua*** and ***uə*** look in transliteration like ***uwa, uwə***” [Avrorin 2000: 18]). The Manchu reconstructed forms ****buə*** and ****suə*** function in Nanai as actual ones. In other related languages the diphthong ****uə*** was contracted to ***ū*** (c.f. Evenki ***bū*** ‘we (exclusive)’, ***sū*** ‘you (pl.)’.

[1] Sibe materials are not available to me at the moment.

Thus the reconstructed Manchu personal pronouns are [2]:

* ***bī*** 'I'	****buə*** 'we (exclusive)'
****sī*** 'you (sg.)'	****suə*** 'you (pl.)'
****i*** (****ī*** ?) 'he or she'	****tiə*** 'they'.

In all Manchu-Tungusic languages of the northern branch possessive (or predicative-possessive) suffixes are used, cf. Evenki ***-w*** (< ****-bi***) 'my', ***-s*** (< ****-si***) 'your (sg.)', ***-wun*** (< ****-bu-n***) 'our (exclusive)', ***-sun*** (< ****-su-n***) 'your (pl.)', ***-tin*** (< ****-ti-n***) 'their'); Nanai ***-ji*** (< ****-wi*** < ****-bi***) 'my', ***-si*** 'your (sg.)', ***-su*** 'your (pl.)', ***-či*** (< ****-ti***) 'their'.

It is evident that the 1st person (singular and plural) and the 2nd person (singular and plural) possessive (predicative-possessive) suffixes derive from personal pronouns with short vowels in singular (****bi***, ****si***) and without diphthongs in plural (****bu***, ****su***). It is also evident that the 3rd person plural suffix ***-ti*** (***-ti-n***, ***-či***) derives from the personal pronoun ****ti*** 'they'[3] (resp. ****tiə*** with diphthongization) which of all Manchu-Tungusic languages has reflex ***čə*** 'they' only in Manchu (as stated above, A. F. Bojtsova pioneered in the comparison of the possessive ***-ti(n)*** ∼ ***-či*** with the Manchu personal pronoun ***čə***).

The above mentioned forms of the third person plural are in the Manchu-Tungusic languages in the complementary distribution: the personal pronoun ***čə*** (< ****tiə***) 'they' is characteristic only of Manchu and apparently Jurchen (the Jurchen language materials are very scarce) while personal affixes specifically of the 3rd person plural (***-tin, -ti, -či*** < ****-ti***) exist in all Manchu-Tungusic languages except Manchu and Jurchen (in Solon the 3rd person both singular and plural is expressed in Nominative by the suffix ***-nini*** ∼ ***-nĩ, -ini*** ∼ ***-ĩ***, in oblique cases by the suffix ***-ni*** [Poppe 1931: 116]).

The 3rd person pronouns in the rest of Manchu-Tungusic languages (except Solon and Jurchen – the former uses demonstrative pronoun instead of personal one, the latter is documented insufficiently) are:

Evenki ***nuŋan*** ∼ ***noan*** ∼ ***nōn*** ∼ ***noŋan*** ∼ ***nohan*** ∼ ***nuan*** ∼ ***nuwan*** ∼ ***nuɣan*** (dialect variants) 'he or she', ***nuŋartin*** ∼ ***noartin*** ∼ ***noɣartin*** ∼ ***nōrtin*** ∼ ***nuartin*** ∼ ***nuartən*** ∼ ***nuwartin*** ∼ ***nuɣartin*** ∼ ***nuŋaltin*** (dialect variants) 'they';

Even ***noŋăn*** ∼ ***noŋan*** ∼ ***noŋon*** ∼ ***ŋó$_o$ŋan*** (dialect variants) 'he or she', ***noŋărtăn*** ∼ ***noŋartan*** ∼ ***noŋorton*** ∼ ***ŋó$_o$ŋartán*** (dialect variants) 'they';

Negidal ***noŋan*** ∼ ***nuɣan*** (dialect variants) 'he or she', ***noŋatil*** 'they';

Oroch ***nuan'*** ∼ ***nuan'i*** ∼ ***nuŋan'i*** ∼ ***nua*** 'he or she', ***nuati*** ∼ ***nuŋanti*** 'they';

Udihe ***nua(n)*** 'he or she', ***nuati*** 'they';

[2]I abstain from reconstrusting the Manchu inclusive pronoun ***musə*** which obviously contains plural marker ***-sə***.

[3]J. Benzing reconstructed ****ti*** 'they' in the Manchu-Tungusic proto-language [Benzing 1956: 108].

Ulch ***nān***, ***nāni*** ∼ ***nōni*** ‘he or she’, ***nāti*** ‘they’;

Uilta ***nooni*** ∼ ***nōni*** ‘he or she’, ***noočі*** ‘they’;

Nanai ***n’oani*** ∼ ***noani*** ∼ ***nuan*** (dialect variants) ‘he or she’, ***n’oanči, noati*** ∼ ***n’oati*** (dialect variants) ‘they’ [Tsintsius 1975: 611].

Different etymologies of the personal pronouns in question have been suggested.

A. F. Bojtsova presumed that “the pronouns ***nuŋan*** and ***nuŋar*** were originally demonstrative pronouns; equally with them in Evenki and in other Manchu-Tungusic languages personal pronouns ***i*** (***in***) and ***ti*** (***tin***) were used, as personal pronouns they remained until now only in Manchu (***i*** ‘he’, ***čə*** ‘they’), inasmuch as demonstrative pronouns ***nuŋan*** and ***nuŋar*** were semantically close to personal pronouns ***i*** (***in***) and ***ti*** (***tin***), they crossed with each other. [...] After crossing with the personal pronouns ****in*** and ****čin*** (***tin***) the demonstrative pronouns ***nuŋan*** and ***nuŋar*** transformed to ***nuŋan-in*** (Sg.), ***nuŋartin*** (Pl.)” [Bojtsova 1940: 23-24].

In his “Studies in Korean Etymology” G. J. Ramstedt expressed an opinion that the Tungus (= Evenki) particle ***-nun*** was the base of the 3rd person pronoun:

> “tung. ***-nun*** (W. 203) a particle used after converbs in a strengthening sense: ***ęmęmi-nun gūnęn*** ‘as soon as he came he said’, Titow ***nun*** ‘if, when’; hence the derivative ***nun-gan*** («just that one»>) ‘he, she, it’ = ‘the person (***-gan***, see W. 194) just named or visible’; go. (Grube 69) ***nuán***, (Petr.) ***nōani***; pl. tung. ***nuŋar-tin, nuŋar-tan*** ‘their persons, they’”[Ramstedt 1949: 170].

By the way, G. J. Ramstedt compared the Tungus particle ***-nun*** with Korean “***nįn*** ∼ ***nąn*** (G. 198) «an ending – the appositive case ‘as for’ [...], used also to emphasize the noun»”[Ramstedt 1949: 170]. Later on G. J. Ramstedt wrote that the word ***nuŋan*** (***ńuŋan, núgan***) was derived from the stem ****nu*** or ****nun*** ‘look!’ and literally the Tungus word ***nuŋan-i, nuŋar-tan*** (Pl.) meant ‘of that person (there)’, ‘of those persons (there)’ [Ramstedt 1957: 214].

J. Benzing suggested an etymology which was strange from the point of view of historical phonetics but correct in semantic respect. J. Benzing reconstructed e.g. Evenki ***nuŋan*** ‘he or she’ as ****ŋuga-ni*** and compared its stem ****ŋuga-*** with Manchu ***guwa*** (in reality ***gua*** — A.P.) ‘other, another’ [Benzing 1956: 108-109].

G. M. Vasilevich assumed that the root of Evenki pronouns ***nuŋan*** and ***nuŋartin*** is common with the root of the verb ***nuŋ-nī-*** ‘to point (to, at)’ [Vasilevich 1958: 697].

W. Kotwicz pointed out: “So far the origin of the word ***nuŋan*** and its variants remains an enigma” [Kotwicz 1962: 152].

Je. P. Lebedeva supposed that “Manchu pronoun ***i*** ‘he’ and Evenki pronoun ***nuŋan*** ‘he’ developed from the common root ***ni-***, from which originated the affixes of the third person singular ***-ni*** ∼ ***-n***” [Lebedeva 1985: 10]. In conclusion Je. P. Lebedeva proposed

a hypothesis that the Manchu-Tungusic pronouns of the third person derive from the word ***ni*** ∼ ***naj*** ‘human being’ which is present in all Manchu-Tungusic languages of Amur river (Priamurye) [Lebedeva 1985: 18].

The following internal reconstruction of the above variants may be suggested:

noɣa(n↓)-ni ∼ ***nuɣa(n↓)-ni*** ‘he or she’, ***noɣan-ti*** ∼ ***nuɣan-ti***‘they’.

The intervocalic consonant is reconstructed as ***ɣ*** (not ***ŋ*** or ***ŋg***) because ***nuŋa(n↓)-ni*** (or ***nuŋga(n↓)-ni***) and ***nuŋan-ti*** (or ***nuŋgan-ti***) would have been reflected in Nanai as ***n’oŋgan’i*** and ***n’oŋgan’či*** (not ***n’oan’i*** and ***n’oan’či***). In addition the Uilta (Orok) word ***bō*** (***boo*** in the cited dictionary) ‘sky, weather, world’ [Ikegami 1997: 23] may be compared with Uilta ***nō-ni (noo-ni)*** ‘he, she’: the former is reconstructed as ***buɣa*** (cf. Evenki ***buɣa*** ‘world, sky, …’), consequently the latter may be derived from ***nuɣa-ni***.

The proto-form ***noɣa(n)*** ∼ ***nuɣa(n)*** was definitely a substantive since possessive suffixes could be attached to it. Moreover the reflex of the word ***noɣa(n)*** ∼ ***nuɣa(n)*** in Evenki and Even has a plural form ending in ***r*** which is peculiar to substantives ending in ***n*** (cf. Evenki ***oron*** ‘domestic reindeer (Sg)’ – ***oror*** ‘domestic reindeer (Pl)’). According to G. M. Vasilevich in Evenki Kur-Urmi subdialect “the personal pronoun of the third person plural is often used without the possessive suffix ***-tin***: ***nuŋar*** ∼ ***nuŋartin***” [Vasilevich 1948: 284].

It is worth saying that the Evenki demonstrative pronoun ***tar*** ‘that’ in case of using as a personal pronoun attaches possessive suffixes only together with the marker of alienable possession (e.g. ***tari-ŋi-n*** that-ALIEN-POSS.3SG). As for the Evenki personal pronouns ***nuŋan*** ‘he or she’ and ***nuŋartin*** ‘they’, the possessive suffixes ***-n*** and ***-tin*** are never accompanied by the alienable possession marker: ***nuŋan-mā-n*** ‘him’ (he-ACC-POSS.3SG), ***nuŋar-wa-tin*** ‘them’ (they-ACC-POSS.3PL). In this respect the Evenki pronouns of the third person resemble the word ***upkat*** ‘all’, e.g. ***upkatwun*** ‘all of us’, ***upkačitin*** ‘all of them’ [Vasilevich 1958: 449] (***upkat-wun*** all-POSS.1PL(EXCL), ***upkači-tin*** all-POSS.3PL).

As regards the etymology of the third person pronouns in question, I dare say paradoxically: J. Benzing was right and not right simultaneously. In my view the proto-form ***nuɣan*** may be compared not with Manchu ***gua*** ‘other, another’ (as J. Benzing did; it was mentioned above that “the diphthongs ***ua*** and ***uə*** look in transliteration like ***uwa***, ***uwə***” [Avrorin 2000: 18]) but with Written Mongolian ***nögöge***[4] (***nögüge*** in Mongolian-English Dictionary [Lessing 1960: 592]) ‘the other, opposite’, the earlier form of which was probably ***nögege*** (cf. Written Mongolian ***ködöge(n)*** ∼ ***ködege(n)*** ‘open steppe; country side, rural district’ (***ködüge(n)*** ∼ ***ködege(n)*** in Mongolian-English Dictionary [Lessing 1960: 478]). The root of the Written Mongol word ***nögöge*** is ***nögö-*** < ***nöge-*** (***-ge*** is apparently a derivational suffix). The root ***nöge-*** ‘the other’ possibly had a synharmonic variant ***noɣa-***; synharmonic variability was peculiar to “a great deal of words” in Written Mongolian, such

[4]I am grateful to P. O. Rykin for explanation concerning some features of Written Mongol.

as ***noǰi (noǰiɣ)*** ∼ ***nöǰi-ge*** ‘coagulated blood’, ***mołtulχu*** ∼ ***möltülkü*** ‘to release, to untie, to unbind’, ***bortun*** ∼ ***börtün*** ‘mud with water, with silt’ etc. [Vladimirtsov 1989: 126].

Interestingly, the Even pronoun ***noŋăn*** ‘he or she’, ***noŋărtăn*** ‘they’ (dialect variants [Tsintsius 1975: 611]) and the Oroch pronouns ***noŋon’i*** ‘he or she’ and ***noŋoti*** ‘they’ (Khadi dialect variants found in texts [Avrorin, Lebedeva 1966: 97, 99, 101]) preserved the original ***o*** in the initial syllable while in some other Manchu-Tungusic languages it was substituted by ***u***. By the way, in most of Evenki dialects the sound ***o*** in the first syllable of a word presupposes the same sound in the next syllable, e.g. ***goro*** ‘far’, ***solo-*** ‘to go up stream’, ***toɣo*** ‘fire’; to put it differently, the sequence ***o*** – ***o*** is normal and the sequence ***o*** – ***a*** is generally prohibited.

The semantic reason for the suggested comparison of the Manchu-Tungusic ****noɣa(n)*** ∼ ****nuɣa(n)*** ‘he or she’ and the Mongolic ****nöge-*** ∼ ****noɣa-*** ‘the other’ is that the Manchu-Tungusic ****noɣa(n)*** ∼ ****nuɣa(n)*** presumably expressed the obviative meaning – not ‘he or she’ but so to speak ‘another he or another she’. This assumption may be confirmed by a valuable semantic observation of Prof. Ikegami: “In Orok the demonstrative pronouns ***əri*** ‘this’, ***tari*** ‘that’, ***əril*** ‘these’, ***taril*** ‘those’ etc. refer also to the third person(s). But the usage of ***nooni*** and ***nooči*** is restricted in comparison with that of ***tari*** etc. I assume ***nooni*** is used as a substitute for any of the class of substantives designating a personal object, provided that a personal object designated by the substantive contrasts with another personal object (or personal objects) in the context. The class also contains substantive phrases designating a personal object, such as ***purigə nari*** ‘a young man’. In personification ***nooni*** is also used as a substitute for any substantive designating an animal or a devil, ***nooči*** is the plural form of this substitute”[Ikegami 2001: 132].

Later on S. Kazama came to conclusion that in Nanai and Udihe third person pronouns are better treated as obviative ones [Kazama 2008: 141-153].

In connection with the obviative meaning of the Uilta pronoun ***nooni*** Prof. Ikegami pointed out that “a similar usage, however, may possibly be discovered also in other Tungus languages besides Uilta. It seems to me to be older than the usage of these words as general pronouns for the third person(s). The stem ***noon-*** is probably derived from a substantive stem. But the etymology is yet open to question, although some opinions have been advanced. It is possible that the usage of Uilta ***nooni*** may help us trace this word to its origin” [Ikegami 2001: 134]. To my mind, the final phrase was prophetic.

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List of Abbreviations

ACC – accusative
ALIEN – alienable possession
EXCL – exclusive
go. – Goldi (Nanai)
Petr. – Petrova
POSS – possessive
tung. – Tungus.

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Summary

The 3rd person pronouns in Manchu and Jurchen are different from those in the rest of the Manchu-Tungusic language family. As for Manchu, the contemporary 3rd person pronouns ***i*** ‘he or she’ and ***čə*** ‘they’ may be reconstructed as ****i*** or ****ī*** and ****tiə*** correspondingly. A. F. Bojtsova was the first who compared Manchu ***čə*** ‘they’ with possessive suffixes of the 3rd person plural (e.g. Evenki ***-tin***, Udihe ***-ti***, Nanai ***-či***).

The stems of Evenki ***nuŋan***, ***nuŋartin***, Even ***noŋăn***, ***noŋărtăn***, Negidal ***noŋan***, ***noŋatil***, Oroch ***nuŋan’i*** (***noŋon’i***), ***nuŋanti*** (***noŋoti***), Udihe ***nua***, ***nuati***, Ulch ***nāni***, ***nāti***, Uilta (Orok) ***nōni***, ***nōči***, Nanai ***n’oan’i***, ***n’oanči*** (the first word has meaning ‘he or she’, the second one ‘they’) trace back to the proto-form ****noɣa(n)*** ∼ ****nuɣa(n)*** which may be compared with Written Mongolian ***nögö-ge*** < ****nöge-ge*** ‘the other, opposite’. The root ****nöge-*** possibly had a synharmonic variant ****noɣa-***. The semantic reason for the suggested comparison is that the stem ****noɣa(n)*** ∼ ****nuɣa(n)*** presumably expressed the obviative meaning – not ‘he or she’ (‘they’) but “another he (another she)” (“other they”). This assumption may be confirmed by a valuable observation of Prof. Ikegami who demonstrated convincingly that the Uilta (Orok) 3rd person pronouns express obviative meaning.