

THE HISTORY OF THE VOGUL AND OSTIAK LANGUAGES

Phonetics

The earliest Vogul and Ostiak linguistic records are personal names embedded in 14th-15th century Russian texts. We have numerous 18th century manuscript glossaries of several Vogul and Ostiak dialects. Some of these were published in *Linguarum totius orbis vocabularia comparativa*, edited by P. S. Pallas, Petropoli 1786-1789. Empress Catherine II had this multilingual dictionary compiled at the suggestion of the German philosopher W. Leibniz. It contains the earliest linguistic records of several Siberian languages. The data naturally have to be treated with caution, for the glossaries were compiled by Russian officials ignorant of the relevant languages, who consequently wrote down several errors and faulty or distorted formations. Nevertheless the dictionary affords much valuable supplementary material relative to the chronology of certain phonetic changes.

Important information about phonetic history can also be obtained from loan words in the Ob-Ugric languages, and from widely differing dialects.

Steinitz (1955, 154) postulates the following vowel system for ancient Vogul:

| | | | |
|---|---|----|----|
| ū | ē | ū̄ | ī |
| | ā | | ē̄ |
| | | | ā̄ |
| u | i | ü | i |
| | | | e |
| o | a | | ā |

Honti (1979b) however does not postulate middle tongue position vowels:

| | | | |
|---|---|----|----|
| ū | ī | ū̄ | ī̄ |
| | ā | | ā̄ |
| u | i | ü | i |
| o | a | | ā |

In the southern (Tavda) dialects according to Steinitz (1955, 156-59) the ancient Vogul *ē* and *e* came together as *ε*, which then was assimilated to the *ā*, thus the middle tongue position vowels died out. (Honti postulates only two degrees of opening in ancient Vogul from the outset.)

Thus the southern Vogul phonemic system may originally have been the following:

| | | | |
|---|---|----|----|
| ū | ē | ū̄ | ī |
| | ā | | ā̄ |
| u | i | ü | i |
| | a | | ā |

The short system remained, only the tones changed: the *u* and *i* became more open *ó*, *ə*. The continuation of *ā* is put by Steinitz and Honti (1975, 12) as *ε*, while the *i* in certain positions was reduced. The long system on the other hand acquired new values. The phoneme *ī* became *ē* before *r*, while the *ē* likewise became *ē* before palatalised consonants and *j*, and the *ū̄* became the same as *ū*. The original *ē̄* and *ō̄*, like their related short sounds, became more open:

| | | | |
|---|----|---|----|
| | ō | | ī |
| | ā̄ | | ē̄ |
| | ā̄ | | ā̄ |
| ó | ə | ü | |
| | a | | ε |

Honti (1975, 13) combines the vowels of the first and non-first syllable in the following table (* only occurs in the first, and ** only in other syllables):

| | | |
|----|-----|----|
| ō* | ē** | ī |
| ā̄ | | ē̄ |
| ā̄ | | ā̄ |
| o* | | i* |
| ə* | ə** | ü* |
| a* | | ā* |

Thus what Steinitz denotes as the medium length, non-first syllable *ō* and *ū̄*, Honti regards as the juncture feature *əω*.

The vowel systems of the western and eastern groups may have developed in common from the ancient Vogul system (Steinitz 1955, 159-65). On the evidence of Tatar and Russian loan words, the *ā̄* and *ā̄* were labialised to *ōā̄* and *ā̄ō̄* in the 17th century, while the *ā̄* labialised to *ō̄* around 1600. The *ē̄* and *ε* replaced the *ā̄* and *ā̄*. The *ū̄* was delabialised

after *k*, but it made the *k* labial: *kū* > *kōā*. And so the west-east system developed:

| | | | |
|-----------|-----------|------------------|-----------|
| \bar{u} | \bar{e} | \bar{u} | \bar{i} |
| \bar{o} | | $\bar{o}\bar{a}$ | \bar{a} |
| u | i | ū | i |
| o | a | āo | ā |

Owing to Russian colonization the western dialect broke up into little islands scarcely in contact with each other, and further changes took place. This group however can by now be regarded as almost extinct, for around 1960 only in a village by the Pelym did there live a few Vogul-speaking families. The eastern dialect's vowel system meanwhile developed similarly to that of the neighbouring Konda Ostiak dialect.

The northern dialect underwent the greatest simplification (ibid. 165-67). Firstly the \bar{a} became the same as the \bar{a} , and the \bar{e} the same as the *e*. The \bar{u} , \bar{u} , \bar{e} , *e* and *i* were assimilated into other vowels, while the \bar{a} became labialised:

| | | | |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| \bar{u} | \bar{e} | \bar{u} | \bar{i} |
| | \bar{a} | | \bar{a} |
| u | i | ū | i |
| o | a | | e |

The \bar{i} was assimilated into the *i*. The \bar{a} in the 16th century was labialised into \bar{o} . The *a* also changed to *o*, only remaining *a* beside χ . The \bar{u} was assimilated into the \bar{u} . The change of the \bar{e} > *a* in place of the labialised \bar{a} (> \bar{o}) made the system regular. Into that was later assimilated the phoneme \bar{a} , while the \bar{a} also became velar and was assimilated into the *a* that remained beside the χ . Finally the \bar{i} became more open and today's regular system took shape.

According to Steinitz (1950, 48) the ancient Ob-Ugric, or ancient Ostiak, vocalism survived till about 1900 in the eastern Ostiak dialect. Since then the only changes that have taken place are that the \bar{o} and *o*, and the \bar{e} and *e* have come together.

| | | | |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| u | i | ū | i |
| o | | \bar{o} | e |
| \bar{o} | a | \bar{o} | \bar{a} |
| \bar{o} | \bar{a} | \bar{o} | \bar{o} |

In the Surgut dialect several more changes took place.

In the western (= northern and southern) Ostiak dialects every labial palatal vowel became illabial (\bar{o} > \bar{a} , \bar{o} > *e*, \bar{u} > *i*, \bar{o} > *o*). In the velar vowels the changes \bar{i} > *i* and \bar{o} > *o* occurred, so that the ancient Ostiak system shrank from 15 to 9 vowels:

| | |
|-----------|-----------|
| u | i |
| o | e |
| a | \bar{a} |
| \bar{o} | \bar{o} |
| \bar{a} | |

This situation was preserved moreover in the most northerly (Obd.) sub-dialect, while in the others (southern, Ber., Ser., Ni., Kaz.) the system developed further. In the central (Ni., Ser., Ber.) sub-dialects the vowels in upper tongue positions became much shorter, and the full and the reduced ones became equal in number:

| | |
|-----------|-----------|
| u | e |
| \bar{o} | a |
| \bar{u} | \bar{i} |
| \bar{o} | \bar{a} |

The Kaz. system differs from these only in having two fully palatal phonemes: *e* and \bar{a} (Steinitz 1950, 51-56).

Paradigmatic vowel changes (*Ablaut*) occur in both Vogul and Ostiak, differing widely between one dialect and another (Steinitz 1950, 98-110 and 1955, 305-330).

In the delabialising dialects of both languages the neighbouring *k*, η , γ became labial when the vowels changed, e.g. *kō* > *koe* or *ōko* > *eko*, so extending the consonantal system (Steinitz 1950, 111-115). The position is similar in Vogul (Steinitz 1955 *passim* and Kálmán 1976³).

The consonants did not undergo any major changes. The Ob-Ugric * θ (< Ur. **s*, **š*) in Vogul changed uniformly to *t*, while in the various Ostiak dialects it became either *l*, *ʌ*, *t*, or *j*. In Vogul the Ob-Ugric *l* and *l'* remained. In Ostiak however they remained only in the north and east, while elsewhere the changes *ʌ* > *t* or *ʌ'* > *t'* took place. In the majority of northern and eastern Vogul sub-dialects and in the northernmost Ostiak a *š* > *s* change took place at the beginning of the 19th century. That is, it still appears as *š* in the relevant words in the glossaries compiled at the end of the 18th century (Kálmán 1976¹, 31-32). In the northern Ob-Ugric dialects a *k* > χ change occurred before velar vowels. Afterwards the \bar{a} , \bar{a} > \bar{a} , *a* became velar, and so the *k* can now stand