Sayan Turkic reindeer terminology

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1. Sayan Turkic languages and peoples

Sayan Turkic is the technical term used in Turcology to refer to the South-Siberian branch of the Turkic language family, which includes standard Tuvan, Tofan and various related languages spoken by small communities in neighbouring Mongolia, China and Buryatia. Sayan Turkic can be further divided into two groups: Steppe Sayan Turkic and Taiga Sayan Turkic. To the former belong Standard Tuvan and its dialects together with Altay-Sayan varieties spoken in China and western Mongolia, and Uyghur-Uriankhay (Tuhan) of East Khövsgöl. The traditional lifestyle of Taiga Sayan Turkic peoples used to be based on low-land i.e. steppe pastoralism, characterized by herding of sheep, goats, cattle (cows and yaks), horses and camels.

The Taiga Sayan Turkic branch includes Tofan, the Toju variety of Tuvan and some varieties of the Tere-Khöl area as well as Soyot of Buryatia and Dukhan of Mongolia’s northern Khövsgöl Aimag. Reindeer breeding and hunting has characterized the lifestyle of these groups until recently.¹ During the last decades reindeer herding has dramatically decreased in the Taiga-Sayan area - see, for instance, Donahoe and Plumley (2003). Presently, reindeer herding is best maintained among the Dukhan people.

2. The Dukhan people

Secluded in the northernmost regions of Mongolia’s Khövsgöl region – bordering in the northeast with Buryatia and in the west with the Tuvan republic – the Dukhan people total approximately 500 people and are divided into two main groups: those of the “West Taiga” (bariïn dayga) originate from Tere Khöl, whereas those of the “East Taiga” (jüün dayga) came from Toju, both of them regions in Tuva. Presently,

¹ For more on the taiga vs. steppe division, though with slight differences from the view presented here, see Žukovskaja et al. (2002).
around 32 Dukhan families are reindeer herders in the surrounding taiga areas, on the southern slopes of the Sayan mountains. They follow what has been called the Sayan-type of reindeer breeding, characterized by small-size herds of reindeer used as pack and riding animals and as a source of dairy products. (For more on the Sayan-type of reindeer herding, see Vainshtein 1980). Hunting used to be an important part of the Dukhan economy. However, the Mongolian government has recently banned hunting and fishing and, in order to balance the impact of these proscriptions, the Dukhan families were granted dwelling in the taiga and a state pension for tending to reindeer, calculated on the basis of the number of family members. The remaining Dukhan families have settled down in the village of Tsagaan Nuur and in the neighbouring riverside areas, abandoning reindeer breeding. Some families, however, regularly return to the taiga in the summer months and tend to reindeer. Although the Dukhan people identify themselves as duubha, in Mongolia they are generally called Tsaatan, a rather derogatory term meaning ‘those who have reindeer’, stressing in this way the fact that they are not like Mongolian herders. Recently the more neutral Mongolian term tsaačin ‘reindeer herders’ has been introduced to refer to them.²

Nowadays, Dukhan is actively spoken by the older generation, that is, by speakers older than 40. Younger Dukhans communicate in Darkhat-Mongolian,³ although they possess a passive knowledge of Dukhan. Furthermore, language shift is more acute in Tsagaan Nuur and riverside areas, where most of the households have already completely switched to Darkhat-Mongolian. For a linguistic description of Dukhan, see Ragagnin (2011).

² In the available published materials, Dukhans have been designated by several other names such as “Urianxay”, “Taiga Urianxay”, “Taigín Irged” ‘peoples of the taiga’, “Oin Irged” ‘peoples of the forest’ and “Soiot” (Badamxatan 1962: 3). Dukhans do not call themselves Uyghur, as claimed in some publications.

³ The general view among scholars is that the Darkhat people are of Turkic origin and that their language and customs have become Mongol in the past few centuries. For a short survey of Darkhat grammatical features, see Sanžeev (1931) and Gáspár (2006). On Darkhat Mongolian’s substrate of Turkic features, see Ragagnin (2012b).
Below I shall alphabetically list and comment on Dukhan reindeer terminology, a very unique part of Dukhan lexicon. The data is supported with materials from the other neighbouring Taiga Sayan Turkic varieties:

(1) *anhay* ‘new-born reindeer calf’; cf. Toju-Tuvan *aⁿiy* ‘reindeer calf’ (Čadamba 1974: 63), Tofan *anhay* ‘new-born reindeer calf’ (Rassadin 2014: 52) and Soyot *aⁿay ~ aⁿhay* ‘reindeer calf up to year of age’ (Rassadin 2006: 22). Steppe Sayan Turkic displays cognates referring to the young of other animals, e.g. Tuvan *aⁿay* ‘young offspring of a goat or mountain goat’ (Monguš 2003: 130b). Etymologically, *anhay* is rather obscure. It could be traced back to Turkic *ana* ‘mother’ augmented with the hypocoristic suffix -KAy, thus meaning ‘mommy’. Similar expressions are used, for instance, in Turkish (see Ragagnin 2012a: 135–136 for details). For other views, see Rassadin (2014: 54).

(2) *bogana ~ mogana* ‘male reindeer castrated at an advanced age’; cf. Tere-Khöl Tuvan *boxana* ‘gelded reindeer’ (Kuular and Suvandi 2011a: 165); in Toju-Tuvan a cognate of this term occurs in the compound *bogana čari* denoting an older breeding reindeer. Etymologically, *bogana ~ mogana* may represent a nominal formation built with the Mongolic suffix -gAnA, used for names of plants and animals (Poppe 1954: 41), or a deverbal formation involving the Mongolic suffix -gAn (Poppe 1954: 45) or the corresponding denominal suffix -gAn deriving zoological and botanical names in Old Turkic (Erdal 1991: 87). Moreover, *bogana ~ mogana* may be related to Gagauz *bobana* ‘seven/eight-year-old sheep’ (Ščerbak 1961: 153). This claim, however, needs further scrutiny.

(3) *döṅh r* ‘young reindeer buck’; cf. Toju Tuvan *döṅggür* ‘without antlers, with dropped antlers, one of the terms in use for a breeding reindeer’ (Čadamba 1974: 64), Tofan *döṅggür* ‘male domesticated uncastrated ridable reindeer in its third year and first mating season but not ready for mating’ (Harrison 2010: 57) and Soyot *döŋkir* ‘reindeer buck’ (Rassadin 2006: 46). In Tuvan, the primary meaning of *döṅgür* is ‘antlerless, bold’ (Tenišev 1968: 178a); also cf. Altay Turkic *toŋkur* ‘komolyj, bezxvostyj, obrezannyj, kucyj; derevo bez veršiny i vetvey’ (Verbickij 2005: 364). Also, see Tatarincev (2002: 235–236) and Monguš (2003: 495b) in this

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5 This scarcely documented special lexicon is rapidly getting lost. In my fieldwork sojourns, I could personally see how fuzzy it is among many Dukhans.
respect. It is a moot question whether this term may have originally been applied to a young reindeer buck after its first (autumnal) antlers fell.

(4) eʰsirik ‘new-born reindeer calf’; cf. Toju-Tuvan e’zirik ‘affectionate name for reindeer calf’ (Čadamba 1974: 63) and Soyot eʰsirik ‘new-born reindeer calf’ (Rassadin 2006: 85, 204). Steppe Sayan Turkic, on the other hand, displays corresponding items referring to the young of other animals, cf. ezirik (eʼzirik) ‘goatling, (kid), fawn’ (Tenišev 1968: 608b, Dorlig and Dadar-ool 1994: 242a). Etymologically, eʰsirik is a transparent Turkic agent formed from the verbal stem eʰs- ‘to get drunk’ (cf. ED 251: esür- ‘to be, or become, drunk, intoxicated) and literally means ‘drunkard’. This denomination is most probably is based on the fact that the new-born baby reindeer tumbles like a drunkard. Moreover, it likely belongs to the set of taboo names applied to the young of both humans and animals in order to protect them from evil spirits. It is quite unlikely that evil spirits would take away a drunkard. In addition, from eʰsirik the verbal stem eʰsirikte- ‘to calf/to fowl’ is formed.


(7) hokkaš ‘young reindeer up to one year of age’; cf. Tere-Khöl Tuvan xokaš ‘reindeer calf below one year of age’ (Seren 2006: 81), Tofan hokkaš ‘one-year-old reindeer calf’ (Rassadin 1971: 190) and Soyot hoqaš ~ hokkaš ‘one-year-old reindeer calf (in its second year)’ (Rassadin 2006: 85). Etymologically, hokkaš is rather obscure. Arguably it goes back to the diminutive formation kuškaš ‘small bird’ from kuš ‘bird’ through phonological distortion, not uncommon in taboo
names. Note in this respect that a structurally similar lexeme is documented in Sarig Yugur goʰqaʃ ‘small bird’ (Nugteren and Roos 2006: 110).

(8) hospayak ‘new-born reindeer fawn rejected by its own mother’; no cognates are documented so far in the rest of Taiga Sayan Turkic. Morphologically, hospayak is a nominal form derived from the verbal stem hos- ‘to refuse animal’s babies’. Standard Tuvan employs the form xosturgan (xos- ‘to refuse animal babies’ + causative + part) to characterize a young animal refused by its own mother, e.g. xosturgan xuragan ‘rejected lamb’.

(9) jarı ‘“calm” riding and packing reindeer older than four years of age’; cf. Tofan jara, Soyot čarı ‘riding and packing reindeer’ (Rassadin 1971: 194; 2006: 153), Tere-Khöl and Toju Tuvan čarı ‘castrated reindeer’ (Seren 2006: 82). Interestingly, Steppe Sayan Turkic varieties show a rather different picture. The standard Tuvan cognate čarı refers to a breeding male reindeer (Tenišev 1968: 520a) and in the Uyghur Uriankhay Sayan-Turkic variety of Eastern Khövsgöl jarı is the only existing term meaning ‘reindeer’ (Ragagnin 2010: 142). Note, in this respect, that Sayan western Buryat dialects, which show several Turkic features, displays the cognate zari denoting both a gelded reindeer (older than 4 years of age) and a (breeding) reindeer (Čeremisov 1973: 251b). Cognates of this term are quite widespread in Siberia. Yeniseian terms such as for instance Yugh ‘seʰ:r ‘reindeer’ and Ket s’el’ ‘reindeer’ may be related items (Werner 2002: 183); also see Khabtagaeva (2015: 116). Historically, a cognate of jarı is documented in Rašīd-ud-Dīn’s Jāmiʿ al-tawārīkh (Compendium of Chronicles). In section 107 dealing with the “forest” Uriangelqat tribe, the Ilkhanid Persian historian wrote: “They had no cattle or sheep but raised and caught instead mountain oxen, mountain rams, and jūr (antelope), which is like a mountain sheep, which they milked and drank” (Thackston 2012: 42, §107). Also see the information supplied by Marco Polo’s 13th century travelogue concerning reindeer herding nomads in the neighbouring Bargu area (cf. Ragagnin 2015). Furthermore, Dukhan jarı occurs in the nominal compound eʰter-jarı which designates a breeding reindeer. Formal and semantic cognates are well documented in other Taiga Sayan Turkic varieties, e.g. Tofan eʰter jarı (Rassadin 1996: 149-150) and Soyot eʰter čarı (Rassadin 2006: 153). In these

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6 I wish to thank my colleague Choduraa Tumat for providing me with this example.
forms, *jari* is clearly used as a species collective denomination. The compound noun can thus be interpreted as ‘the category of rutting reindeer’.

(10) *ibi* general term referring to ‘reindeer’ (*rangifer tarandus sibiricus*); close formal and semantic cognates are documented throughout Sayan Turkic, cf. Tofan *ibi* ‘reindeer’ (Rassadin 1995: 24), Soyot *ivi* ‘id.’ (Rassadin 2006: 50), Tuvan *ivi* ‘id.’ (Tenišev 1968: 200). Etymologically, *ibi* is possibly related with *iwiq* ‘a sheep-antelope which frequents stony tracks and deserts’, recorded in Maḥmūd Al-Kāšyārī’s encyclopaedic work Dīwānu l-Luğat al-Turk (Compendium of the languages of the Turks) and glossed with Arabic *żabya* (Dankoff and Kelly 1982: 108; also cf. Hauenschild 2003: 100).

(11) *mïndɨ* ‘fertile reindeer doe’; cf. Toju Tuvan *mïndi* ‘reindeer doe’ (Čadamba 1974: 63) and Soyot *mïndi* ‘adult reindeer doe; camel cow’ (Rassadin 2006: 93). Beyond Sayan Turkic, cognates of *mïndɨ* are widespread across north Asian languages whose speakers are reindeer herders, see Tatár (1985) for examples. Etymologically, *mïnd* most likely represents a loanword from Samoyedic; cf. Mator *méinde* ‘*rangifer ferus*’. According to Helimski (1997: 301-302), Mator *méinde* may be traced back to Proto-Samoyedic *mọjan-cez* (*mọjan* ‘ground [gen]’ + *cez* ‘[tamed] reindeer’). In Dukhan, the term *mïndi* also occurs in the following expressions: *haš* (‘hairless’) *mïndi* ‘older reindeer doe with little fur’ *gîsîr* (‘barren’) *mïndi* ‘dry doe’ and *uliɣ mïndi* ‘big/mature reindeer doe’.

(12) *mïndîjak* ‘reindeer doe that has fowled once’; cf. Tofan *mïndîjaq* ‘two-year-old reindeer doe’ (Rassadin 1995: 47b), Soyot *mïndîjaq* ‘three-year-old reindeer doe’ (Rassadin 2006: 93) and Toju Tuvan *mïndîčak* ‘važenka dvux let’ (Čadamba 1974: 63). Etymologically, *mïndîjak* is a diminutive form of *mïndi*.

(13) *öskusek* ‘motherless fawn’; cognates of this Dukhan lexeme are not documented in the rest of Taiga Sayan Turkic. Morphologically, *öskusek* represents a diminutive formation from *öskus* ‘orphan’ (cf. ED 116–117: Old Turkic *ögsüz* ‘motherless’).

(14) *bir düktøy guuday*9 ‘three-year-old castrated reindeer’ (one hair-der guuday). Based on the same syntactic structure, i.e. cardinal number + *dük* ‘hair’ augmented

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7 In this regard, also see Hauenschild (2003: 105–106).
8 Tofan, on the other hand, employs the term *ingen* (cf. ED 184: Old Turkic *ingên* ‘female camel’) with reference to a reindeer doe. On the term *ingên*, see also Hauenschild (2003: 94).
9 According to several Dukhan informants, *bir düktøy guuday* is a synonym for *düktøy miis*. 
by the adjectivalizing suffix -LXɣ + guuday, i̱̱i̱i̱ tükty̱ guuday and ɨš tükty̱ guuday refer, respectively, to ‘two-haired guuday’ and ‘three-haired guuday’, i.e. ‘four-year vs. five-year old gelded reindeer’. Cognates are documented in the other Taiga Sayan Turkic varieties: Tere-Khöl Tuvan iyi tükty̱g kuuday ‘three-year-old male reindeer’, ɨš tükty̱g kuuday ‘four-year-old male reindeer’ and Toju Tuvan bir dükty̱g mîyîś ‘male reindeer of about 3 years of age’, iyi dükty̱g mîyîś ‘male reindeer of about four years of age’, ɨš dükty̱g mîyîś ‘male reindeer of about five years of age’ (Seren 2006: 82).

(15) sã̱̱sǝk mĩĩs ‘reindeer with one dropped antler’ (sã̱̱sǝk ‘one of two’ and mĩĩs ‘antler’).

(16) dasfanay ‘wild, i.e. not tamed reindeer’. Among Taiga Sayan Turkic varieties merely Soyot displays the formally and semantically close cognate daspanay ‘wild reindeer’ (Rassadin 2006: 43). The term dasfanay possibly goes back to taspan (see below) and aŋ ‘wild animal’.


(18) dongur ‘approximately 18-month-old male reindeer’; cf. Tere-Khöl Tuvan tongur/tuŋxur ‘approximately two-year-old male reindeer’ (Kuular and Suvandi 2011a: 165), Toju Tuvan dongur ‘approximately one-year-old young reindeer’ and Soyot donγur ~ donγîr ‘two-year-old reindeer buck’ (Rassadin 2006: 45). Etymologically, dongur might be traced back to a rhotacised form of Turkic toŋuz ‘pig’. This assumption, however, needs further investigation. In this respect, it should be kept in mind that names of strong and dangerous animals, such as the boar, belong to the set of taboo names in use across Siberia and neighbouring areas.

(19) donggý ‘approximately 18-month-old reindeer doe’; cf. Tere-Khöl Tuvan tuŋxay ~ tuŋguy ‘approximately two-year-old reindeer doe’ (Kuular and Suvandi 2011a: 165). Further formal cognates of donggý are Mator toŋoi ‘pig’ (Helimski 1997: 365, §1060), Toju Tuvan donγay ‘two-year-old wild reindeer’ and Tuvan donγay (Monguš 2003: 474a) ‘bear cub’. Etymologically, donggý may also ultimately go back to a rhotacised form of Turkic toŋuz. Note that in this regard that Helimski (1997: 365, §1060) traced Mator toŋoi ‘pig’ back to Proto-Turkic *doŋur. Further Dukhan expressions including the term donggý are jaš donggý, literally ‘young
*donggyù*, referring to a young doe about to foal, and *hur* *donggyù*, literally ‘last year’s* donggyù*’ employed for a reindeer doe that has foaled twice.


(21) *uzën but* literally ‘long leg’; this term specifically refers to a reindeer buck that will be castrated in the autumn, at least according to some informants; cf. Soyot *uzë̂n-but* ‘young reindeer buck in its third year of age’ (Rassadin 2006: 139).

### 3. Transcription and abbreviations

The transcription employed here follows general principles employed in Turcology, with the following additions: the symbols *ɨ* and *ʉ* represent the high central vowels occurring beyond first syllables, and the super-script *h* designates preaspiration of fortis consonants, corresponding to Tuvan and Tofan glottalization/pharyngealization, marked here with the symbol ³. Abbreviations occurring in the grammatical glosses are: **CAUS**: causative, **DER**: derivation, and **PART**: participle.

### References


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