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RUSSIAN IN KAMCHATKA: PROMINENT FEATURES IN THE VIEW OF LINGUISTS AND SPEAKERS[1]

Alexander Krasovitsky, Surrey

Abstract

In notes left by travellers and government officials who worked in Kamchatka, there are numerous remarks concerning characteristic properties of Russian varieties spoken by the local inhabitants – descendants of Russian colonists and russianised Itelmen. In speaking of the general impression produced by these varieties, they wrote about numerous seeming and obvious deviations from Russian, many of which they documented thoroughly for future investigators, identifying issues that require more comprehensive research. Later, in linguistic studies, we come across perspicacious observations on language properties that for some reason were not developed further. In this paper, I will discuss sound system properties reported in linguistic works as characteristic features of Kamchadals' speech but which, for some reason, have not been investigated. I will demonstrate the acoustic reality behind these observations. Further, I will discuss how Old Settlers themselves perceive distinctive features of their language and then argue on which phonetic phenomena their concept of the 'true Kamchadal speech' is based.

Background

In this paper, consideration is given to remarks on the prosody of the Russian varieties in Kamchatka made by Vladimir Bogoraz in his *Itelmen notebooks* (*Itel'menskie tetradi*) and by Konstantin Braslavec in the *Dialectological Survey of Kamchatka* (*Dialektologičeskij očerk Kamčatki*). Computer analyses provide, as far as possible, accurate accounts on prosodic phenomena that appeared to be similar to those observed by Bogoraz and Braslavec. The study is based on audio recordings collected in two Old Settlers' communities in the township of Mil'kovo in the valley of the Kamchatka river and in the township of Tigil in the north-west of the peninsula (Korjak Autonomous Region). The expedition took place in July 2001 and was organised by Professor Christian Sappok (Ruhr University, Bochum). Our speakers (18 in total) were born between 1912 and 1948, 16 are Russian monolinguals while two of the women were born into Itelmen families and learned Russian at school. The audio archive (DAT cassettes and CDs) is located in the Ruhr University Bochum (Linguistic Laboratory of the Institute of Slavistics); copies are available in the Department of Phonetics of the Russian Language Institute (RAN) in Moscow.

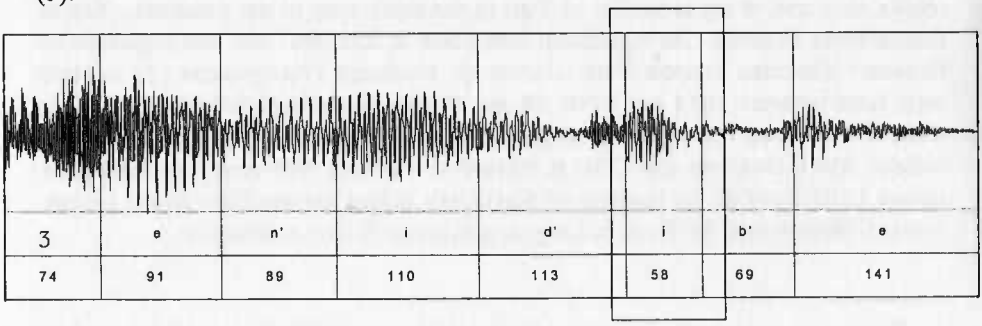
1 The research was carried out as part of the project "Russian in Siberia. Acoustic Database and Contact Phenomena" funded by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (11.2003 – 11. 2004).

On the phenomenon of epenthetic vowels

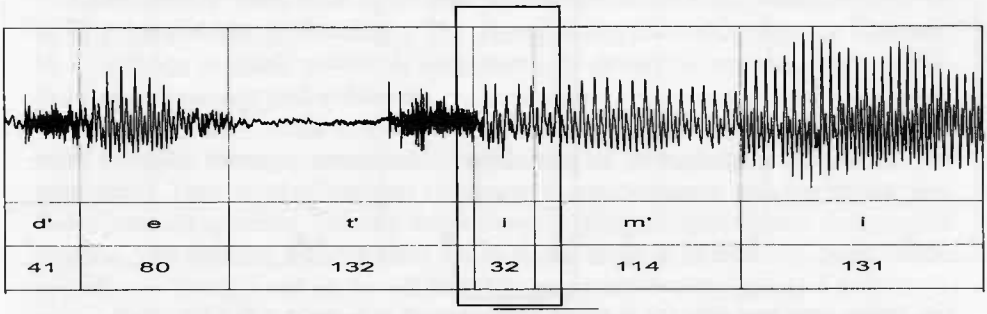
In 1900 Vladimir Bogoraz visited several Kamchadal settlements on the west coast of the Kamchatka Peninsula. Apart from the Itelmen language data he collected there, Bogoraz reported some characteristic features of the Russian variety spoken by bilingual local residents. In particular, he made some remarks on the prosody of their Russian speech, which in his opinion was considerably influenced by the Itelmen language. Using audio recordings and instrumental phonetics, an attempt was made to ascertain which acoustic features match the remarks made by this scholar.

One of the characteristic prosodic properties Bogoraz noted was "a peculiar accent, a kind of *hold-up* (*ottjažka*), or as if there are pauses everywhere in the middle of words, which is not in the least characteristic of Russian" (*Itelmenskie tetradi*, cited in BRASLAVEC 1968: 120). Judging from contemporary recordings, Bogoraz appears to have been referring to a "hold-up" at the turn of two consonants, which gives the impression of delay before producing the second consonant. If this assumption is correct, this feature, although not as frequent today as it probably was in the time of Bogoraz, may still be noticed in some of the idiolects, both in the northwest, in Tigil (close to Kavran, where, in fact, the phenomenon was noticed by Bogoraz) and in the centre of Kamchatka. Admittedly, instances representing the feature in question occur most frequently in the speech of an informant from Tigil, an Itelmen woman of 73 who spoke only Itelmen before she went to school but in her younger years shifted to Russian and has now almost forgotten Itelmen.

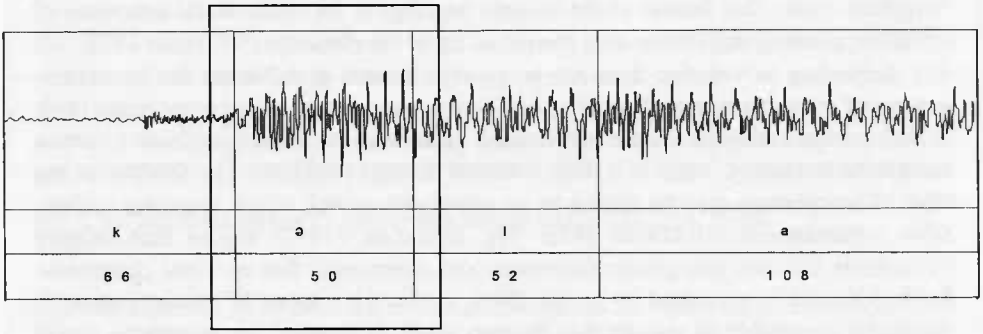
Instrumental analysis provided acoustic correlations for the phenomenon noticed by Bogoraz. Waveforms of words with consonantal clusters with a "hold-up" show the obvious presence of an epenthetic vocalic element separating adjacent consonants (graphs 1, 2, 3 and 4). The length of these elements, as shown on the graphs below, may vary. In some instances it is rather short (e.g. 32 ms in (2)), hence it is no wonder that the vocalic segment is not always perceived as a proper vowel – rather as a short pause between the two neighbouring consonants. However, in other instances its length may approach that of original vowels when reduced and weak and an additional prominence arises in accordance with the epenthetic vowel as in (5).



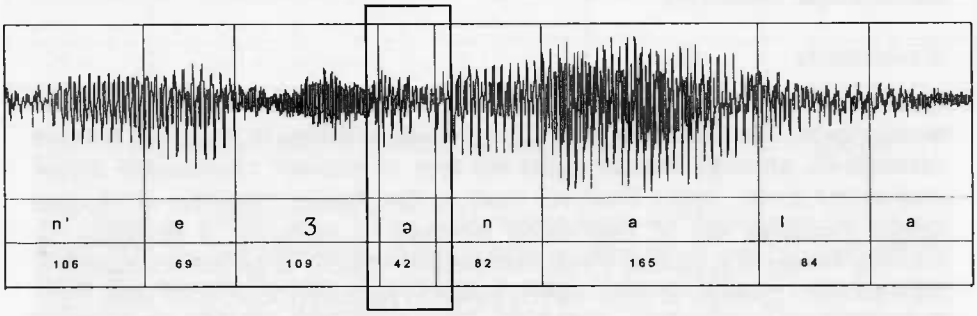
(1). **Do ženid'by** ('before marriage'). CD 23-1. Tigil.



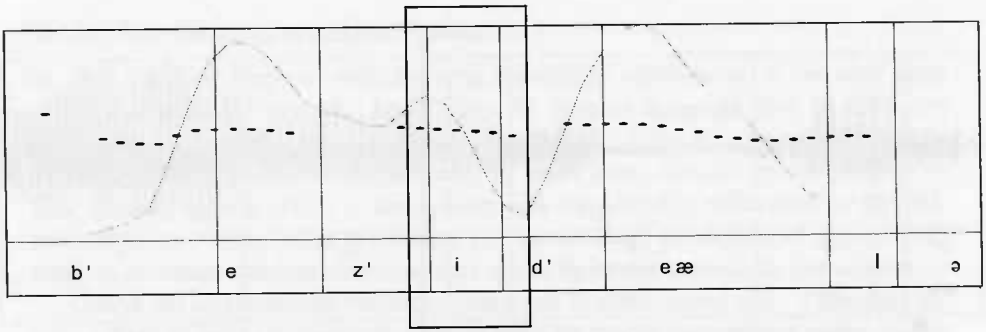
(2). A ja doma odna. I s **det'mi**, i na rabotu ('And I am at home alone. With the children and the work'). CD 23-2. Tigil.



(3). Oni na svoem jazyke govorjat i **klanjajutca**, lebedi ('They speak their own language and bow'). CD 5-2. Mil'kovo.



(4). Nu ja sama-to **ne znala** ('I did not know myself'). CD 23-1. Tigil.



(5). Doma xuže **bez dela** ('It is worse without work at home'). CD 23-2. Tigil.

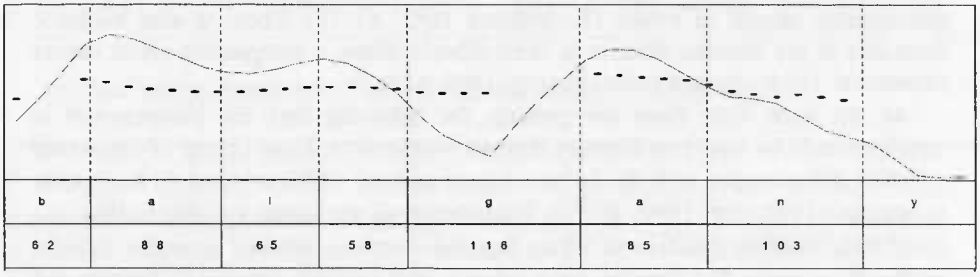
The question arises as to why these and similar Russian clusters turned out to be unacceptable to Itelmen speakers and what kind of conflict epenthetic elements were thought to settle. One feature of the Itelmen language is the consonantal saturation of syllables; consonantal chains may consist of up to six elements (VOLODIN 1976: 52-53). According to Volodin, there are no purely phonetic prohibitions for the combinations of consonants, morphological positions however may apply some restrictions to their compatibility. A certain consonantal group may be unacceptable on a certain morpheme boundary, while it is fully tolerated in other positions. The conflict on the edge of morphemes may be solved by an epenthetic vowel, which separates undesirable combinations (VOLODIN 1976: 70). BOBALJIK (1997) argues that Itelmen consonants fall into two groups (resonants and obstruents) that on some morpheme borders should be separated by an epenthetic schwa for reasons of syllabification. It would be reasonable to assume that Itelmen speakers inserted the epenthetic vowel to break up clusters they found awkward in Russian. This assumption is partly supported by the fact that the epenthetic vowel in our instances separates either consonants that occur on morpheme borders (as in *de*[t'i]*mi* (2) or *do ženi*[d'i]*by* (1)) or fall into two different classes in terms of classification proposed by Bobaljik ([k] and [l] [kəl]*an'ajutca* (3)).

Word prosody

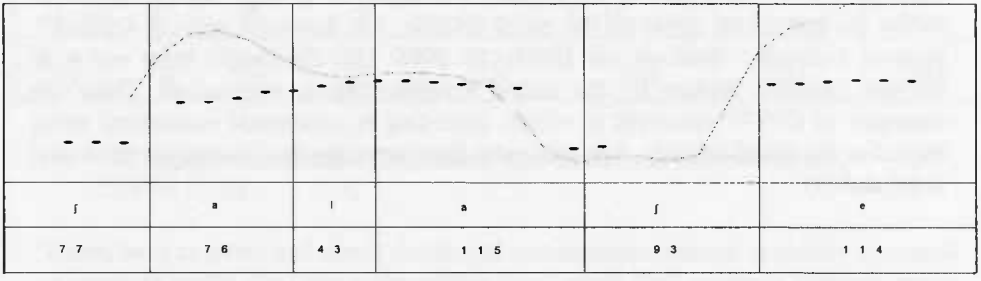
Speaking of intonation, Bogoraz pointed out that the Itelmen made the Russian speech "quite tonic with long and short stressed syllables (*s dolgimi i kratkimi udarenijami*), although Russian resists this type of prosody" (*Itelmenskije tetradi* cited in BRASLAVEC 1968). Braslavec observed that Russian intonation of bilingual Itelmen resembles that of their native language. In particular, a stretching, or drawling manner of producing words characteristic of some of the Itelmen dialects is common when speakers of these dialects switch to Russian (BRASLAVEC 1968: 120). These remarks are reminiscent of informants who stated that "When I find myself among Kamchadals I speak only Kamchadal (i.e. Russian as spoken by the older generation of Old Settlers)... with stretching (*v rastjažku*)".

Unfortunately, there is no more detailed description of the phenomenon reported by Bogoraz and later by Braslavec. The corresponding phenomenon in our data may be a tendency to create additional prominence by means of intensity. This mechanism may be summarised as follows.

In three-syllabic words with final-syllable stress (CVCVCV́) vowels in antepretonic syllables undergo considerable lengthening or strengthening (or both at the same time). Their level of intensity (loudness) is approximately equal or higher than that of stressed syllables. Thereby words develop additional prominence in the initial position. The pretonic syllable turns out to be the weakest in such structures, while syllables on the right and on the left form two peaks of intensity (graphs 6 and 7).



(6). I, ne videli **balagany**? ('Never saw balagany?'). CD 23-1. Tigil.

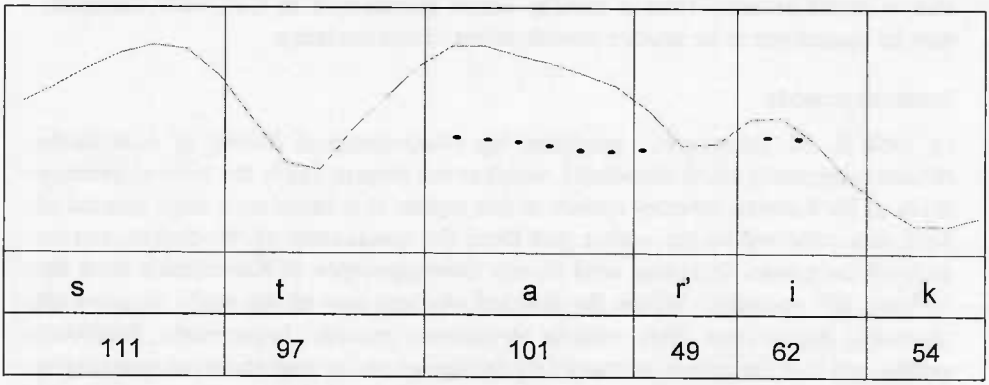


(7). ...v etom **šalaše** i žili ('...it was in that tent that [we] lived'). CD 6. Mil'kovo.

The length of vowels in CVCVCV́ may change in an undulating way (long-short-long), as in (6). The undulating rhythm in three-syllable words with the final-syllable stress may account for what Bogoraz had in mind when speaking of "long and short syllables" or what our informants called "stretching" (*rastjažka*). The phenomenon under consideration may have several causes. First, it could be a North Russian inheritance. In North Russian dialects there is a tendency to intensify the unstressed vowel in the syllable second from the stressed syllable. This intensification has been

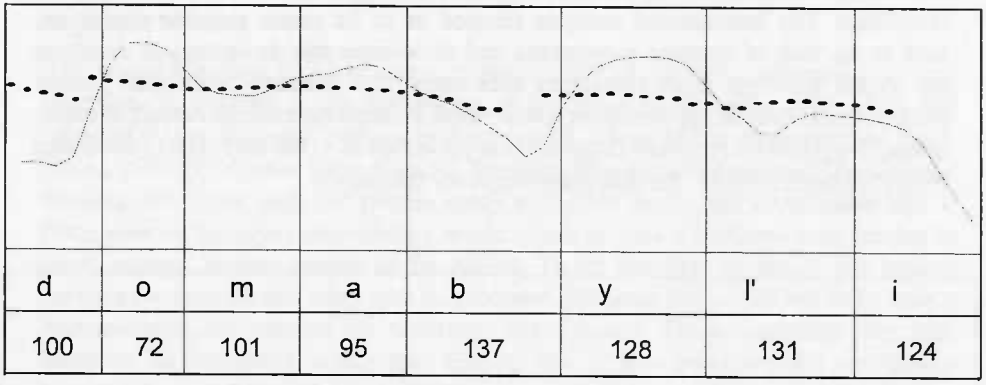
defined by scholars as secondary stress, *vtorostepennoe udarenie* (BROCH 1907; KUZNECOV 1949; PAUFOŠIMA 1983). Most frequently, secondary stress occurs word-initially in structures CVCVCV́(CV), and is found both on stems and on clitics, e.g. *òboždú* ('wait' 1st pers. sg. future), *pòzovút* ('call' 3rd pers. pl. future), *stàrikí* ('old people'), *dò koncá* ('to the end'). However each of the cited instances (32 verbs and 32 nominals) may be realised without secondary stress as well, apparently under other prosodic conditions (PAUFOŠIMA 1983: 65). The dominant role in creating additional prominence on word-initial syllables appears to be to pitch, the value of which in all instances is higher than that on the stressed syllable. Furthermore, in some cases the length of the vowel in initial syllables may exceed (sometimes double) the length of the stressed one, although measurements show considerable spread in values (PAUFOŠIMA 1983: 67-71). There is also evidence from one of the Russian dialects in West Siberia where a comparable effect occurs (SENKEVIČ 1954: 63 cited in BRASLAVEC 1968: 118).

At the same time there are grounds for believing that the phenomenon in question could be based on Russian-Itelmen interference. Long chains of unstressed syllables did not agree with the Itelmen accent system, which is based on the trochaic principle (VOLODIN 1997: 60-71). Prominence on the initial syllable in this case could help Itelmen speakers to adjust Russian words to habitual prosodic models. However, to prove that Russian word prosody was actually exposed to Itelmen and that the phenomenon indicated above reflects the result of this process, would require finding instances of some other prosodic structures that were changed under the influence of Itelmen. For instance, is there a tendency for a word-initial prominence in CVCV́ structures as for Russian loanwords in Itelmen, which uniformly follow the pattern of stress on the initial syllable, e.g. *koróva* > *kórova*, *kapústa* > *kápusta*, *svobóda* > *svóboda*, etc. (BOBALJIK 2005: 10)? Do similar traits appear in Russian varieties spoken by the mixed Russian-Itelmen population? There are examples of CVCV́ structures in which, according to perceptual evaluation, stress shifted to the initial syllable. Two examples demonstrating this change are presented in (8) and (9).



s	t	a	r'	i	k
111	97	101	49	62	54

(8). Molčalivyj **starik** byl. (The old man was silent). CD23-2. Tigil



d	o	m	a	b	y	l'	i
100	72	101	95	137	128	131	124

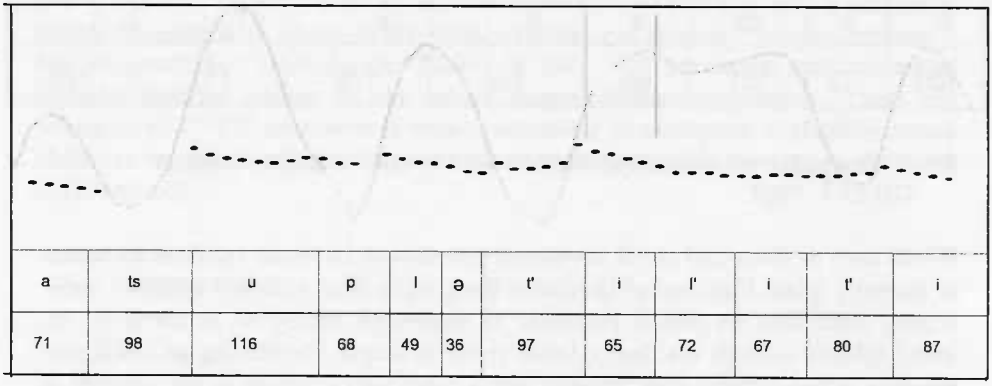
(9). V 20-x godax uže **doma** byli (Houses were as early as in the twenties). CD 23-1. Tigil

Words such as *domá* and *starík* developed prominence on initial syllables by means of intensity (plain line) and pitch (dotted line), while final accented syllables under normal conditions are clearly perceived as unstressed. Moreover, in *starik* [a] the initial syllable exceeds the final syllable vowel in length. Developing an initial prominence in two-syllable final stressed words is not very common in the varieties in question. In these two instances however this change takes place under specific conditions. A stressed final syllable adjoined the initial stressed syllable of the next word (*...domá býli; ...starík býl*). This junction should be disfavoured by speakers used to the interchange of stressed and unstressed syllables and the first prominence shifted to the left. The phenomenon may be regarded as a 'repair strategy' used by Itelmen speakers to adjust Russian prosody to the prosody of their native language

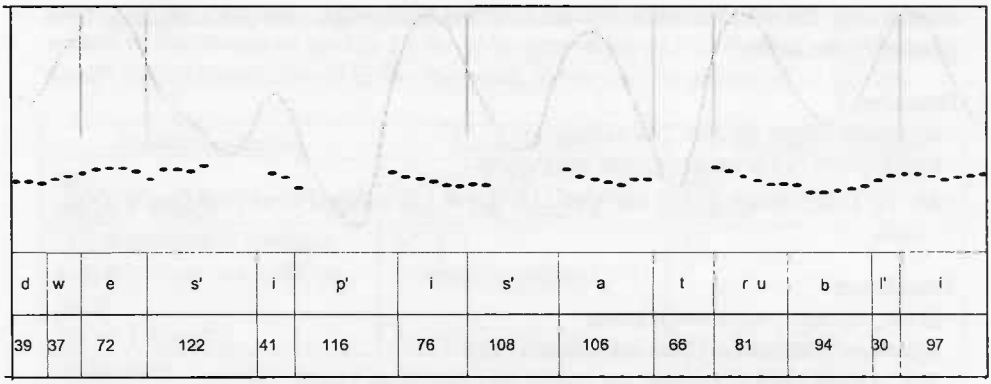
and to eliminate unacceptable models. Initial prominence in CVCVCV́ structures may be considered to be another manifestation of this tendency.

Sentence prosody

In 1968 K. M. BRASLAVEC published his *Dialectological Survey of Kamchatka* (*Dialektologičeskij očerk Kamčatki*), which to the present day is the most exhaustive study of the Russian varieties spoken in this region. It is based on a large amount of field data collected by the author that fixed the actual state of the dialect, and on archival documents including semi-literate correspondence of Kamchadals from the 19th and 20th centuries. Within the detailed phonetic part of the study focusing on segmental features one finds remarks on sentence prosody. In particular, Braslavec pointed out that the speech of many Old Settlers gives the impression of speaking in tongue-twisters. This manner of speaking is reminiscent of the rapid speech (*rublenaja reč'*) that R. I. Avanesov regarded as a characteristic feature of North Russian dialects (AVANESOV 1949). Similar examples of rapid speech occur in my own recordings. The instrumental analysis allowed us to fix major acoustic properties, such as the lack of sentence prominence and of considerable deviations in intensity; the phrase split into short syntagmas each equal to a phonetic word with similar pitch contour. One of the examples (*Otcu platili-ti dvesti pjat'desjat rublej*) demonstrating the prosodic structure in question is presented in (10a) and (10b) (the dotted line is for pitch contour, the thin plain line is for intensity).



(10a) Otcu platili-ti…



d	w	e	s'	i	p'	i	s'	a	t	r u	b	l'	i
39	37	72	122	41	116	76	108	106	66	81	94	30	97

(10b) …dvesti pjat'desjat rublej ('Father earned 250 rubles'). CD 6. Mil'kovo

Segmental features

Russian Old Settlers in Kamchatka are well aware of the major properties of their language. In contrast to the population of European Russia who quite often feel ashamed of the dialectal features in their speech, many of the inhabitants of Kamchatka willingly discuss them if asked. Speakers who have lost many of the dialectal features still know how old people speak and often assure the investigator that if there were no strangers around they would speak in quite a different way, having in mind another, archaic variant of the dialect. To fix this type of dialect is a task of baffling complexity and what may be recorded will most likely turn out to be only a demonstration for scholars (cf. VAKHTIN: this volume). These recordings may still, however, be interesting in that they give an idea of how members of a community perceive their dialect and which features they regard as constitutive for the dialect. Short fragments of such demonstrations by two informants were recorded and analysed them in relation to phonetic properties.

Fragment 1
U men'a **muʑɨk** (<ʒɨ) zəxatel kaki-tə **galuʂki** (<ʃ) jis't'/ ja i nəvarila **galuʂki** (<ʃ) // on u men'a najel**ʃə** (<s) / a patom **bruxə** (<r'u) u nivo **ʒəbalelə** (<z) // ja ni **ʒnalə** (<z) **t͡s**(ev)o (<**t͡ʃ'**) delət' / pasprasilə v bal'ni**t͡ʃ'**u (<t͡s) pazvanit' // on gəvərit ne nadə **ʒvanit'** (<z) bal'ni**t͡ʃ'**u (<t͡s) / ja tak **vilet͡ʃ'**us' (<vy) // ja sizu (<ʒ) i duməju / **muzyk** (<ʒy) u min'a abjel**ʃə** (<s) kakimi-tə klo**t͡s**kəvi / tiper' v **bruxe**-tə (<r'u) klo**t͡s**ki-tə ra**ʃ**puxli (<s)

Translation
My husband wanted to eat dumplings, I cooked dumplings. He ate his fill and after that his belly began to ache. I did not know what to do and asked if I should call up the hospital. He says – don't call the hospital, I will get over myself. I am sitting and

considering: the man has eaten too much of the dumplings, now the dumplings have swelled in the belly.

Fragment 2
- oj, xəraʃo / devə / k'iʃel' (<s') navar'im
- k'iʃel' (<s') / i / et samə / p'irok razd'eləim
- da / i p'i rag'i mozn ə (<ʒ) nad'elat'/ i k'iʃejok (<l') abiʒat'il'nə (<z) ʃvar'it' (<s) nadə

Translation
- Good, my lady, we'll cook kissel.
- Kissel and [hesitation] [we will] bake a cake.
- Yes, we can bake cakes and we should certainly cook kissel.

Although the speakers did not show considerable deviations from standard phonology in the remaining part of the interview, in the passages above the following dialectal features may be found:

- Mixing and etymologically non-motivated use of alveolar and post-alveolar sibilants [s], [z] and [ʃ], [ʒ]: *muzɨk* (<ʒɨ); *galuski* (<ʃ); *najelʃə* (<s); *ʒəbalelə* (<z); *ʒnalə* (<z); *ʒvanit'* (<z); *sizu* (<ʒ); *raʃpuxli* (<s).
- Mixing of affricates [ts] and [tʃ']: *bal'nit͡ʃ'u* (<ts).
- [r'] > [r] before [o, a, u]: ***bru**xə* (<r'u).
- [ɨ] > [i] after non-palatalised trills and labials and their substitution by their palatalised counterparts: *vile͡tʃ'us'* (<vy).
- [j] as a substitution of [l]: *k'iʃe**j**ok* (<l'o)

At the same time a number of fundamental features characteristic of the varieties recorded from the older generation are not present in these fragments:
- Okanje, i.e. rounded allophones of the phoneme /o/ in unstressed syllables;
- Semi-palatalised consonants before front vowels characteristic of systems where the correlation of palatalised – non-palatalised consonants is not present;
- Palatal fricatives in place of /s'/, /z'/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/;
- Neutralisation of affricates /ts/ and /tʃ'/ into one palatal affricate.

These features are not found in the present fragments due to a lack of proper means in our informants' system. They used the phonetic inventory of their own system, which is not equal to that of the archaic dialect spoken by the older generation, and showed the properties of this system as they saw it. For example, it was possible to replace etymologically correct [ʒ] by [z], which is frequently used in the variety (no wonder that it was often reported as a striking feature of the Kamchatka dialect; cf. BRASLAVEC 1968: 81-114); however in our case (*muzɨk*), [i] instead of [ɨ] could reasonably be expected and either semi-palatalised [z·] or palatal [ʒ''] or [z'']. Affricates, mixed in some instances are still chosen from the inventory of the actual

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system of the speakers. Some discrepancies between standard Russian, the archaic variant of the dialect as spoken by the older generation of Old Settlers, and the "mirrored" dialect demonstrated in the fragments above may be presented as follows:

Standard Russian	Actual dialect	"Mirrored" dialect
[ʒɨ] *muʒɨk* (*'man'*)	z"i (ʒ"i), z·i **mu z"i k, *muz·i k*	[zɨ] *muzɨk*
[s'] in prevocalic position *najels'a* (*'eat one's fill' sg., past*) *kis'el'* (*'kissel'*)	[s", ʃ"] or semi-palatalised [s·] **najels"a, *kiʃ"el'*	[ʃ] *najelʃə, k'iʃ el'*
Palatalised consonant in word-final position *vyleʧ'us'* (*' recover' 1st pers. sg. future*) *teper'* (*'now'*)	Non-palatalised consonant in word-final position **vileʧ'us, *teper*	[s'] in word-final position *vileʧ'us', teper'*
Distinguishing affricates [ʧ'] and [ʦ] *bal'niʦu* (*'hospital'* sg. Dat.) *ʧ'evo*(*'what'*, Acc.)	Palatal [ʦ"] or palatalised [ʦ'] **bal'niʦ'u, * ʦ"(ev)o*	Random use of affricates [ʧ'] and [ʦ] *bal'niʧ'u, ʦ(ev)o*
Akanje *p'irag'í* (cakes) *patóm* (*'later'*), *zəbalélə* (*'become ill'* sg., past)	Okanje (at least in some instances) **p'i rog'í, *potóm, *zəbolélə*	Akanje *p'irag'í, patóm, zəbalélə*

(*) expected realisations

In conclusion, the speakers have a clear idea of some characteristic archaic features and are able to demonstrate them using their own system. For other features there are no adequate means in their phonetic inventory and hence they are ignored. This is analogous of a situation in which an observer attempts to demonstrate properties of an alien language or dialect in terms of his own orthography. He is inevitably confined by a set of characteristics only some of which are suitable for demonstrating actual phonetic features. Thus, the fragments presented above may not serve as reliable linguistic evidence for investigating certain phenomena. But they are still of great value since they mirror the archaic language as it exists in the consciousness of the participants of the experiment.

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