Aspects of the grammar of Tundra Yukaghir
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The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
1. Introduction

1.1 Linguistic taxonomy of Tundra Yukaghir, its dialects and genetic affiliation

Tundra Yukaghir (henceforward TY), along with Kolyma Yukaghir (henceforward KY), was for a long time treated as one of the two surviving dialects of the common Yukaghir language (Jochelson 1900, Krejnovič 1958, 1968, 1982). It was not until the beginning of the 21st century that one began to apply the term ‘language’ to these idioms (Kurilov 2001, 2003, Maslova 2003a and 2003c) systematically. Nikolaeva (2006) recognizes the existence of both taxonomic approaches but does not opt decisively for either of them, referring to TY and KY now as idioms, now as varieties, but also as languages. The title of her book suggests that TY and KY, as well as the extinct varieties reflected in it, constitute together the Yukaghir language. At the same time, she finds it appropriate to speak of the ‘Yukaghir family’ (Nikolaeva 2006:viii).

It is mainly the differences in the lexicon and in the sound system that justify regarding TY and KY as languages and not mere dialects. Suffice it to say that 7 of the first 20 items from the Swadesh (1972:283) list do not show in TY and KY any resemblance at all. They are listed below, accompanied by the ordinal numbers they are assigned in the Swadesh (1972:283) list.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>TY</th>
<th>KY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>‘all (of number)’</td>
<td>jawnej</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>‘many’</td>
<td>pojuod’e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>‘one’</td>
<td>maarqan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>‘two’</td>
<td>kin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>‘fish’</td>
<td>al’ γa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>‘person’</td>
<td>köde³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>‘bird’</td>
<td>ujen’ ejrukun</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This kind of situation is uncommon in pairs of closely related languages whose separate status is widely accepted. Thus, English and Dutch would differ from each other only in the positions 10 and 20, as far as the above 7 words are concerned. If one replaced English in this pair by a less ‘contaminated’ West Germanic language, such as German, the cognates would be apparent in all seven positions. That this 7:7 proportion reflects the linguistic reality more objectively than 5:7 of the English/Dutch pair is indirectly confirmed by the situation in Slavonic languages, where the relation 7:7 obtains even in

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1 In view of that the title of Kurilov (2006), which is dedicated specifically to TY, is inconsistent.

2 In the concluding sentences of his work Krejnovič (1968:451) admits that ‘the lexical differences between the dialects are so great that the mutual understanding among their speakers is almost completely excluded’ and acknowledges the possibility that future research may make it necessary to treat the two varieties as independent Yukaghir languages.

3 It has to be noted that köde ‘person’, ‘man’, ‘male’ does have a cognate in KY, but the meaning of the latter does not coincide with that of the TY cognate. The KY word köj means ‘lad’, ‘young male’. This meaning, in turn, is rendered in TY by the word kejp. TY lacks a cognate of the KY šoromo ‘person’. Generally, this list is not a list of mutually missing cognates but an illustration of considerable synchronic divergences in the basic lexicons of TY and KY.
languages belonging to different subgroups, e.g. between Russian (East Slavonic) and Serbo-Croatian (South Slavonic), which show straightforward cognates for all 7 of the listed concepts. Even languages from different groups of the Indo-European family would seem to differ less from each other than TY does from KY: Italian (Romance) would still find its cognates with the same meaning in German (Germanic) at least\(^4\) for the numerals ‘one’ and ‘two’. A great deal of other words that belong to the basic lexicon of a language differ in TY and KY\(^5\). The following selection from Kurilov (2003:9-10) illustrates that. The ordinal numbers indicate the positions in the Swadesh (1972:283) list where applicable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>TY</th>
<th>KY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>75.</td>
<td>lawje</td>
<td>oožii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77.</td>
<td>qajl'</td>
<td>pie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85.</td>
<td>jawul</td>
<td>čuge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89.</td>
<td>n’orine-</td>
<td>šaqalen’-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96.</td>
<td>n’id’erpe-(^6)</td>
<td>ill’uo-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘light’</td>
<td>čajle</td>
<td>pod’orqo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘spirit’</td>
<td>kiid’e</td>
<td>ajbii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘to be deep’</td>
<td>iskel’uol-</td>
<td>čiginmuo-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘to laugh’</td>
<td>ayal’we-</td>
<td>nuo-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘to cry’</td>
<td>oorin’e-</td>
<td>ibel’e-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘slowly’</td>
<td>lad’id’aa</td>
<td>čurud’aa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘already’</td>
<td>motineŋ</td>
<td>čuo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Again, even here a comparison between Russian and Serbo-Croatian, well established, though related, separate languages would yield a nearly 100% correspondence, with only the two last words being different: medlenno vs. sporo\(^7\) and uže vs. već respectively.

An overview of the major phonetic correlations between TY and KY can be found in Collinder\(^8\) (1940:89-95), Krejnovič (1958:17-19) and Kurilov (2003:10-11). Probably

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\(^4\) The German word Person ‘person’, which is a loan, would be a third cognate but it is not counted here as its status in German differs, after all, from that in Italian, or even English, where it is the main lexical device to render the concept ‘human being’ in a variety of contexts, whereas in German it has to compete with the word Mensch.

\(^5\) The pronounced differences in the lexicon between TY and KY led Nikolaeva and Chelismkij (1996:155) to the conclusion that the languages went separate ways around 2000 years ago.

\(^6\) The hyphen indicates that the word form is a base.

\(^7\) An amusing subsidiary observation can be made here. Russian has an absolutely homophonous, if one disregards the weakening of the unstressed /o/ in the second syllable, equivalent of the Croatian sporo ‘slowly’. However the Russian word is antonymous to it, it has the meaning ‘quickly’. One could argue therefore that these words are cognates with the opposite meaning, which would diminish the difference between Croatian and Russian for this set of words yet more.

\(^8\) Collinder (1940:93-95) provides also examples of what he calls the intra-dialectal alternation, meaning the alternations existing within either TY or KY and not between them.
the most profound difference in the sound system is the lack of the fricatives /ž/ and /š/ in TY as compared to KY\textsuperscript{9}.

Significant differences between TY and KY in the lexicon and sound system contrast with a great degree of resemblance of their grammars. In Jochelson’s (1905:371) opinion ‘the phonetical and morphological peculiarities of the Tundra dialect [which set it apart from KY] are rather insignificant’. Kurilov (2006:11) states that in the morphological system between TY and KY ‘there are no essential differences’. Among the most conspicuous of them are:

- the presence of the velar nasal ŋ in some verbal endings in TY, which is opposed by its absence in the KY counterparts
- the shape of the nominal focus marker: –leŋ in TY vs. –lek in KY
- the instrumental case ending: –lek in TY and –le in KY

The cross-linguistic rarity of a simultaneous divergence of the basic lexicon and likeness in the grammar among closely related languages, in the degree they exist between TY and KY, makes it a phenomenon deserving a separate study\textsuperscript{10}. As appears from Kurilov (2003:24), a superficial examination lets one identify only a relatively small portion of Even borrowings in TY accounting for the lexical differences between the latter and KY. These words include primarily kin terms, terms connected with reindeer keeping and some unrelated concepts. A presence of ‘a considerable quantity of Tungus stems’ (Jochelson 1905:372) is a relative assessment\textsuperscript{11}.

Considering great differences in the lexicon, enhanced by differences in the grammar, it is not surprising that, as Kurilov (2003:9) reports, speakers of TY and KY have to resort to Russian or Yakut to secure mutual intelligibility. Speakers of TY have confirmed the correctness of this observation to me. Mutual intelligibility being one of the most objective criterions for distinguishing languages\textsuperscript{12}, one has to recognize that TY and KY represent two separate languages. Just how closely they are related, has yet to be investigated.

\textsuperscript{9} The loss of /š/ may be a recent change since Jochelson ([1926] 2005:84) states that there was the word šukunmalqel ‘year’, which is nowadays sukunmol’γal. Generally, there are many instantiations of the sound [s] in the textual material of that period (Jochelson 1900, [1926] 2005).

\textsuperscript{10} The only area with a similar situation I am aware of is the Sepik-Ramu basin, specifically the languages of Lower Sepik-Ramu family. Genetic links have to be established for the languages of that family not as much on a shared lexicon as on the basis of morpheme cognates, precisely plural markers (Foley 2012:2).

\textsuperscript{11} Jochelson ([1926] 2005:92) used one cover ethnonym for Tungusic people of north-eastern Siberia as he shared the view that Evens (the old name for Lamuts) and Tungus (the old name for Evenki) were one ethnicity. No matter how significant the influence of Even on TY lexicon really is, there are still a number of very common words that differ in TY and KY but cannot be explained away as borrowings from Even. Among such words are a priori all words with /l/ in the word initial position, since liquids do not occur in Even word-initially (see e.g. lawje ‘water’ and lad’id’aq ‘slowly’ above). However, this argument is not valid if one assumes borrowings from Evenki, where /l/ in inlaut is not only possible but frequent and alternates with /n/ in Even, e.g. laam(ə)/laame ~ nam ‘sea’. Curiously, Lamuts (‘sea-shore people’, or ‘Tungus living at sea’) would then have to refer to Evenki and not to Evens as it actually does.

\textsuperscript{12} An objection that e.g. some German or Italian dialects may be mutually unintelligible is refuted by pointing out the political dimension present in the decision not to regard them as separate languages. In the case of Yukaghir languages this political dimension is not present as their speakers have never perceived themselves as peoples constituting a common state.
Having established that Tundra Yukaghir is a language in its own right, it is reasonable to inquire into its dialectal structure. However intriguing this question may be, it will hardly ever be possible to give a satisfactory answer (Kurilov, personal communication). This is conditioned by the socio-linguistic factors: a limited size of the area in which TY is still spoken, merging and the subsequent leveling of the potential dialectal differences. As a result of placing speakers of different geographical origin into one settlement (see section 1.6) decades ago, an artificial mixture of the potentially present dialects was created. An additional problem is the frequent lack of the possibility to trace the precise geographic origin of the present day speakers’ ancestors. At the present stage it can only be stated that there is a considerable amount of intra-linguistic phonetic variation in TY (see also Collinder 1940:91, 94) along various parameters. These variations manifest themselves tautomorphologically as well as at morpheme and word boundaries:

- tautomorphologic variation:

  - vowel length:

    \[ a \sim a\]
    \[
    \begin{align*}
    & kečínunţja \sim kečínunţjaa \text{ ‘[they] used to bring’} \\
    & pajpe \sim paajpe \text{ ‘woman’}
    \end{align*}
    \]

    \[ i \sim i\]
    \[
    \begin{align*}
    & kečínunţja \sim kečínunţja \text{ ‘[they] used to bring’}
    \end{align*}
    \]

  - vowel quality and vowel quality plus length:

    \[ o(o) \sim a(a)\]
    \[
    \begin{align*}
    & pojuol- \sim pajuol- \text{ ‘to be numerous’} \\
    & mon- \sim man- \text{ ‘to say’} \\
    & odun \sim adun \text{ ‘that’} \\
    & moorquon’ \sim maarquon’ \text{ ‘only’} \\
    & wojčil’elum \sim waajčil’elum \text{ ‘[s/he] pulled a few times’} \\
    & molγodamunγa \sim molγadydamunγa \text{ ‘up to the breast’} \\
    & ton \sim tan \text{ ‘and’, ‘but’} \\
    & ayuol- \sim oyuol- \text{ ‘to stand’}
    \end{align*}
    \]

    \[ o \sim u\]
    \[
    \begin{align*}
    & muŋajd’iį \sim moŋojd’iį \text{ ‘married woman’}
    \end{align*}
    \]

    \[ o(o) \sim uo\]
    \[
    \begin{align*}
    & id’iŋajgir \sim id’iŋuojgir \text{ ‘morning’} \\
    & oorin’e- \text{ ‘to cry’} \sim uorin’eμut \text{ ‘cry.2PL.1TRG’} \\
    & qoolewm \sim quolewm \text{ ‘[s/he] did smb. in’}
    \end{align*}
    \]
ö ~ o
me juōtem ~ me juotem ‘[s/he] will see’
örd’e ~ ord’a ‘middle’

e ~ a
čiyyet ~ čiyyat ‘from the people’
mitqė ~ mitqa ‘at ours’
juōseγan ~ juōseγen ‘let him show’
el’ideye ~ el’idaya ‘first’
maranme ~ maranma ‘simply’
med’uolde vs. med’uolda ‘having been born’
me qadaa ~ maqadaa ‘somewhere’

e ~ o
jolle ~ jollo ‘moss’
möñer ~ möñor ‘noise’

i ~ a
wayine ~ wayane ~ ‘personal’
saabind’e ~ saaband’e ‘fishing net’
jalmisce ~ jalmasče ‘third’
arinn’e- ~ arann’e- ‘to be deft’

i ~ e
n’iñil’ite- ~ n’iñil’ete- ‘to abuse each other’
paad’iduo ~ paad’eduo ‘daughter’
ĉiribe ~ čirebe ‘plummet’
maranmi ~ maranma ‘simply’
jelekliše ~ jeleklesče ‘forth’

u ~ e
surun’e- ~ suren’e- ‘to be fat’
jeruguu ~ jereguu ‘plain’
n’angumu ~ n’angemu ‘purposely’
unmun ~ enmun ‘every’
-pul ~ -pel ‘PL’

u ~ i
saburqa ~ sabirqa ‘plane’

- consonants:

d ~ r
ĉunje ~ čunjre ‘mind, thought’
janjde ~ jaŋre ‘goose’
It is hard to say whether these alternations are influenced by dialectal differences. In some cases it is safe to assert they are not because they can be observed in one and the same speaker. Prokopyeva (personal communication) made similar observations for KY. In a number of instances the differences are noticed only thanks to the diverging spelling of the same word or suffix used by a speaker to represent his speech in writing (specifically in the transcripts of one’s own speech). Such ambivalent judgment of a speaker reflected in the spelling testifies either of the imperfectness of the writing system or of the fact that there is really a lot of phonetic variation in TY. A graphic illustration of how mixed-up the language has become is the use of the TY form of the interrogative pronoun *neme* ‘what’ by one sibling and its KY equivalent *leme* by another sibling. On the other hand, sometimes one can assume dialectal differences. This appears plausible when phonetic differences are manifest in people originating from distinctly different areas. Historically, two neighboring areas with TY speech communities could and still can be distinguished geographically: the Olyora tundra and the Khalarcha tundra.

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13 For instance, a good deal of [a] ~ [e] variation could be explained by the lack of a grapheme representing a schwa, which is the way /a/ is realized in certain positions.
The Olyora tundra extends from the Alazeya River in the west to the river Bolshaya Chukochya in the east. The Bolshaya Chukochya River forms the western border of the Khalarcha tundra, which stretches as far as Kolyma River in the east. It is tempting to regard differences in the speech of people originating from these two areas as dialectal and conventionally designate the two varieties of TY as Olyora and Khalarcha dialects. The former would be spoken in Andryushkino and the neighboring tundra while the latter would be represented by a few families in Kolymskoye. Representatives of both of these dialects would dwell in Cherski, which is the administrative center of the region. This division would not be unproblematic, though. For one, it suggests at least relative homogeneity of the respective dialects. The divergences presented above testify sufficiently that such homogeneity does not exist in the hypothetical Olyora dialect.

There are no unambiguous data in my possession that would confirm its existence for the Khalarcha dialect. Considering the small size of the Khalarcha speech community, the homogeneity of the dialect is more probable. The assumed dialects would have to differ from each other systematically. On the basis of, admittedly very superficial, observations I could not draw such a conclusion. Quite on the contrary, due to the heterogeneity of the hypothetical Olyora dialect, some of its manifestations could be found that are closer to the Khalarcha dialect. For instance, in the available corpus a word muŋaj’d’ii ‘a married woman’ is attested. It is supposed to have been used by a senior representative of the posited Olyora dialect. At the same time, in Kurilov (2001:256) one finds instead the form moŋaj’d’ii. This latter version of the word is used by a representative of Khalarcha dialect as well. Now Kurilov originates from Olyora tundra. Moreover, he is a son of the senior female speaker referred to above. The intra-family variation makes it difficult, if not impossible, to set dialectal boundaries. Not discarding completely the idea of the division of TY in two quasi-dialectal varieties, Olyora, centered around Andryushkino, and Khalarcha, with its core in Kolymskoye, at present it seems safer to state that TY exhibits a great amount of variation, which might eventually be attributed to dialectal influences.

It is very interesting that speakers of TY themselves are quite aware of this variation and have verbalized the concept reflecting this state of affairs as aruun n’anduol ‘the excess of speech’. It essence is explained in the example below.

(1) Maarqad aruun kin jaan n’iedeln’ej, taγi aruun n’anduolek.

maarqa-n-d aruu ki-n jaa-n n’iede-l-n’e-j
one-GEN-0 word two-GEN three-GEN pronounce-GER-VBLZ-INTR.3SG

InvS.DEM aruu-n n’anduol-ek
speech-GEN exceed[GER]-COP

‘One [and the same] word can be pronounced in two or three ways – that’s “aruun n’anduol” (the language’s being excessive).’

(Kurilov 2001:53, aruun n’anduol)

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14 According to a rough assessment by a speaker originating from Kolymskoye only about three families consistently use TY in their households.

15 n’anduol- can also mean ‘to be better’. Thus, metaphorically, this expression can mean ‘the improvement of speech’.
Other speakers may take a decisively critical stance when seeing other’s ‘deviations’. Thus, I learnt about a senior TY speaker complaining about the linguistic quality of regular radio broadcasts in TY from Yakutsk. Surprisingly – or by now, not surprisingly – the dissatisfied listener and the radio speaker were both from Olyora tundra. The listener’s frustration with the ‘twisting’ of the mother tongue was so intense that she strongly dissuaded her granddaughter from listening to those broadcasts. On another occasion a competent speaker of TY felt sorry about the quality of the translation from Russian into TY of a leaflet about building up a pension, made by a speaker of the presumably same variety of TY, and said that it would have been better not to translate it at all than to have it translated so poorly. This mutual criticism and constant corrections are a serious challenge for a descriptivist, especially if there is an ambition to compile a normative grammar, which is often a very important goal in projects connected with endangered languages, whose achievement is seen as a means of keeping the dying language alive.

Tundra Yukaghir, or wadud aruu (alternatively wadun aruu\textsuperscript{16}) ‘the language of Waduls’, as Yukaghiris themselves call their idiom, is ‘conventionally regarded as a language isolate. Factually it is remotely related with the Uralic languages although it does not form a part of the Uralic family in the strict sense of the word […]’ (Nikolaeva and Chelmskij 1996:155)\textsuperscript{17}. This preliminary, in my opinion very probable, conclusion was arrived at in the course of decades of research. The ethnographer V.I. Jochelson, the first dedicated explorer of the Yukaghir languages\textsuperscript{18}, who lived and studied KY amongst its speakers for several years, denied a genetic relation between the Yukaghir languages and the Uralic or Altaic languages of Siberia (Jochelson 1905:370). He saw a link between the Yukaghir languages and the languages of the American Indians instead (Jochelson 1899 cited by Krejnovič 1958:5). However, Jochelson’s opinion was mainly based on certain cultural parallels, as linguistic material necessary to postulate such a link was not available to him. Jochelson’s view found in recent times a supporter in the indigenous scholar and native speaker of TY, G.N. Kurilov (2003). Kurilov (2003:54-64) dedicates a section in his book to the discussion of potential links between TY and Wintun, a representative of the Penutian languages, spoken in the northern part of California, USA. With reference to the works by Pitkin (1984, 1985), Kurilov (2003:54-64) points out several similarities between the two languages, lexical as well as grammatical ones, whose existence he refuses to ascribe to chance (Kurilov 2003:64). Kurilov does not go as far as to claim that the similarities are due to the common origin of TY and Wintu, preferring to account for them by language contact. Yet he remarks that it allegedly occurred to Collinder for the first time that TY and the Finno-Ugric languages might be related, when the latter discovered similar parallels between TY and that language group (Kurilov 2003:58), thus suggesting that a genuine genetic link between TY and Wintu

\textsuperscript{16} Some speakers reject the alternative as decidedly incorrect. Some others accept both.

\textsuperscript{17} As an isolate, TY is frequently grouped on ethno-geographic grounds with the Paleo-Asian languages (Nikolaeva and Chelmskij 1996:155, Batjanova and Turaev 2010:11-12)

\textsuperscript{18} Strictly speaking Jochelson was mainly concerned with Kolyma Yukaghir which in his time along with TY was regarded as a dialect of the common Yukaghir language. This detail is irrelevant in the discussion of the genetic classification of TY. The same is applicable to references to Krejnovič who did not study TY exclusively, but what was considered the Yukaghir language in its entirety.
may, at least, not be excluded. What are these similarities? As for the lexicon, Kurilov (2003:64) claims to have detected three word pairs which exhibit a semblance:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TY</th>
<th>Wintu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>kiileč ‘s/he flew up swiftly’</td>
<td>ńilit ‘to shoot up’, ‘to fly up swiftly’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>goyoore- ‘to shout’</td>
<td>koho ra ‘to shout/to scream (for a long time)’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qayime ‘raven’</td>
<td>ko’îimma(^{19}) (raven)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Actually, the precise meanings of the Wintun words are as follows: ńilit ‘fly, flies’ (Pitkin 1985:232), koho ra ‘to make a noise continuingly’ (Pitkin 1985:209). All in all, these seem to be just a few look-alikes, which can probably be found for any pair of languages, no matter how distantly the may be related.

Let’s turn to the grammatical properties of Wintun resembling those of TY, according to Kurilov (2003). Most importantly it is the resemblance between the negation markers el, elen’ and ewl’e in TY and the negators ?elew and ?el of Wintun, the other parallel being the genitive suffixes –un and –n in Wintun and TY, respectively (Kurilov 2003:58). Ironically, the segments conveying a negative meaning in TY and Wintun do not coincide. In TY it is the (first) syllable el that is the actual negating device. The form ewl’e is most probably a result of dissimilation: ewl’e < el ‘NEG + l’e- ‘be[3SG]’. In Wintun, on the other hand, the negative meaning is imparted by the privative suffix *{w} (Pitkin 1984:164). As for ?el, it functions as a copula or an evidential (Pitkin 1985:779).

Details about the Wintun forms ?elew and ?el can be found in Pitkin (1984:164, 174, 196):

‘The three copulas (which include the seven auxiliaries {?elew} […] ) are distinguished by their morphological composition and external functions. The negative preverb {?elew} is derived from the negative copula of the same shape, and as a preverb is invariant in stem-form and may only occur with the negative suffix {mina}. It can probably be reconstructed as based on a demonstrative root *{?E} and a stative *{l} or future suffix {le} […] and the privative radical-forming root-deriving suffix *{w}. The forms {?iy}, {?uw}, and {?el} seem also to be based on demonstrative roots *{?E}, {?u}, and *{?E} + *{l}, respectively;’

‘The third member of the class of demonstrative copulas, {?el}, which indicates visual evidence, is syntactically dependent in that it may never be the main verb of a predication and is always dependent on the preceding verb in the verb phrase. It is stative in function and occurs both as the only auxiliary following a main independent verb and as a dependent, suffixed (bound) verb following the three aspectual auxiliaries when they function as location-position-indicating main verbs.’

\(^{19}\) I am not sure about the spelling of this word as I failed to find it in Pitkin (1985). Kurilov (2003:64) renders it as ko’îimma. The other two words are spelt in Kurilov (2003:64) as k’îilit and kohora.
‘Two preverbs, the prohibitive /be`di/ and the negative /`elew/, are distinguished on the basis of their syntactic patterns. Morphologically, they seem to be subtypes of auxiliaries, […] /`elew/ possibly being a derived stem-form of the visual evidential stative copula {`e} plus the privative suffix *{w}.’

It is obvious from this that there is no likeness between the TY and Wintun morphemes compared. As for the similarity of the genitive case markers, it is not sufficient on its own to substantiate a relation, which would specifically tie TY and Wintun, since a similar suffix is found in Uralic, Altaic and Yenisseic languages (Krejnovič 1958:6-7). Therefore, the suggested link between TY and Penutian languages is not a tenable idea in the absence of other indications of their relation, genetic or contact induced.

Another prominent scholar of TY, E.A. Krejnovič, was skeptical about Jochelson’s view. Initially, Krejnovič (1958:5) was cautious about grouping TY with other languages:

“The Yukaghir language takes up an isolated position among the neighboring languages. Till the present time, its origin has not been ascertained. For this reason it is interesting not only as an object of linguistic study but also as an object of historical research.”

Regarding classifying TY as a Uralic language, Krejnovič (1958:7) adopted Angere’s (1957) negative view by saying that ‘J. Angere is right when he categorically claims in his most recent work that the Yukaghir language cannot be counted among the Uralic languages.’ This conclusion is preceded by a convincing critique by Krejnovič (1958:7) of some of the points made by Collinder’s (1940) to promote the view that the Yukaghir language is related to the Uralic family. It is only in his last major work that Krejnovič (1982) expressed himself in favor of the Uralic kinship of TY. He based his changed opinion on a considerable number of morphological parallels between TY and various Uralic languages indicating them throughout his book. The most important argument supporting the genetic relationship between TY and the Uralic family is, as Krejnovič (1982:5) believes, the existence in TY of two types of stems, namely those ending in /a/ and those ending in /e/, and two series of suffixes correlating with those stems, which is reminiscent of the situation in Proto-Uralic where disyllabic stems terminated only in these vowels.

20 In fact, Angere (1957:VII) is not at all so categorical. What he says is that the similarities between the Yukaghir language and the Uralic family are comparable with those between Uralic and Altaic or Indo-European or even Chukchi. In other words, the relation of Yukaghir with the Uralic, as seen in the middle of the 20th century, isn’t specific enough to accept its membership within the Uralic language family.

21 Not denying the plausibility of the assumption of a genetic relationship of TY and Uralic languages and accepting the existence of two types of stems in TY, it has to be noted, however, that the suffix correlation does not seem to exist at least in some modern speakers. They accept alternative forms as equally correct, e.g. nimetege ~ nimetke ‘a big house’, al’γate ~ al’γatege ‘a big fish’. The fact that undervived nouns ending in consonants invariably attach the augmentative suffix –tege may, in fact, synchronically have to do with the syllabic structure of these words and not with their membership in one of the two nominal classes postulated by Krejnovič (1982:35-36). For nouns ending in a vowel even Krejnovič (1982:37) admitted that it is very hard to establish what factors trigger the choice of either allomorph. Nevertheless he puts disyllabic nouns with the final /e/ into the class attaching –tege, while disyllabic nouns terminating in
One of the more recent influential contributions supporting the assumption of a genetic relationship between TY and Uralic languages was made by Nikolaeva (1988a), in which the first attempt of reconstructing Proto-Yukaghir and its comparison with Proto-Uralic is made.

1.2 Origin of the etnonym ‘Yukaghir’ and the autonym wadul

There are different opinions as regards the etymology of the word ‘Yukaghir’. Jochelson (1898 in Krejnovič 1958:3) saw it as a hybrid: the Yukaghir root \textit{juka} meaning ‘far’ is married to a Tungusic suffix \textit{--gir}. Krejnovič (1958:3) did not consider plausible the possibility of borrowing a foreign word by Tungusic people and combining it with a native suffix\textsuperscript{23}. As he had no alternative explanation, Krejnovič (1958:3) was compelled to state that “[t]he origin of the designation “Yukaghir” is unknown.” To my knowledge, Krejnovič never readdressed this issue. Kurilov (2003:7), probably following Tugolukov (1979:5), derives the word from the combination of the Tungusic \textit{dju} and \textit{gir} which

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{/al/} are placed into the class suffixing the allomorph \textit{--tke}. The examples above demonstrate that this correlation is not strict.
  \item \textsuperscript{22} The word is given in Jochelson’s transcription as quoted in Krejnovič (1958:3). According to Maslova (2003:547) and Nikolaeva (2006:106) the \textit{[u]} is long in the adverb ‘far’ in KY, the main object of Jochelson’s study. Nikolaeva (2006:106) gives also the reconstructed form \textit{*uju:ka}. The loss of the vowel length in the root presumably borrowed by the Tungusic neighbours of the Yukaghirs is suspicious as the opposition long vs. short vowels is characteristic not only of both Evenki and Even but of all Tungusic languages and is phonemic in the Evenki language (Andreeva 2008:64). As for TY, in Kurilov’s (2001) dictionary, which is taken as the source of the standard orthography for this work, the adverb ‘far’ surfaces as \textit{jöke}.
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Burykin (2011:389) points out that there had been assumptions that the ethnonym ‘Yukaghir’ was based on the words \textit{juke} ‘cold’ or \textit{joke} ‘far’ that presumably existed in the Even language itself. These words cannot be found in Robbek and Robbek (2005), probably the most comprehensive dictionary of the Even language to date. Moreover, another designation for Yukaghirs, the word \textit{bulon} ‘enemy’, is listed in it instead. Apart from that, the sequences \textit{<ju>} and \textit{<jo>} seem to be inexistent in Even (Levin 1936, Lebedev 1978, Robbek 2007). The few words beginning with the word-initial segments \textit{<ju>} and \textit{<jo>} respectively which are contained in the dictionary of Robbek and Robbek (2005) are borrowings from Russian. The sequence \textit{<ju(u)>} is possible word-initially in Evenki but neither Myreeva (2004) nor Boldyrev (1994, 2000) register a word even remotely resembling the lexemes mentioned by Burykin (2011:389). The sequence \textit{<jo>} can be found in Evenki only in the ethnonym \textit{jokoo} ‘Yakut’ and its derivates indicating that \textit{jokoo} may be a loanword.

  Given these phonotactic and lexicological facts of Even and Evenki, Burykin (2011:393) tries to solve this problem by assuming that at a certain stage the ethnonym \textit{joke} may have existed in Even as a borrowing. Unlike Jochelson he sees the source language not in Yukaghir itself but in Chukchi or Koryak, since, as he claims, prior to the advent of Russian explorers Evens did not have direct contacts with Yukaghirs and probably learnt about them from Koryaks. The hypothetical Even word \textit{joke} was a result of a distorted borrowing from either Chukchi \textit{ajaaket} or Koryak \textit{ajavako} both meaning ‘the remote ones’. It is essential to note here, that Chukchis and Koryaks themselves did not use these words to refer to Yukaghirs but resorted to the twisted Yukaghir autonyms \textit{etel} and \textit{etelsglyn} (Burykin 2011:392). Therefore this idea only makes sense if one makes another assumption, namely that at an historical period which is not recorded, Chukchis and Koryaks did apply the words \textit{ajaaket} and \textit{ajavako} as the name for Yukaghirs, supplied that term to Evens and at a later point switched to the above-mentioned autonym. Later on the Evenki suffix \textit{--gir} had to attach somehow to the assumed loanword \textit{joke}.

  \item \textsuperscript{24} To be more precise the Even word for ‘ice’ is \textit{djuk}, and its Evenki cognate, from which it was probably borrowed in a distorted form by Russians as a part of the ethnonym ‘Yukaghir’, is \textit{djuk}.\end{itemize}
mean ‘ice’ and ‘tribe’ respectively yielding a meaning of ‘ice people’, ‘people living in the icy area’. Interestingly, the Even word *djuk* does not mean just any type of ice but only the thick ice on a river or lake. A general word for ice in Even is *bokes* e.g. *bokes djuu* ‘ice house’ (Robbek 2007:545, Robbek and Robbek 2005). There are indications that a similar relation exists in Evenki between *djuke* and *buukse* (Myreeva 2004). The tundra in which Yukaghirs live is the riverine tundra par excellence. It is also strewn with myriads of lakes, all of which, naturally, freeze in winter that lasts up to seven months. Thus, large stretches of frozen water surface determine the landscape there, justifying the Tungus choice of the word.

There are, however, certain problems with the derivation of the ethnonym ‘Yukaghir’ from the hypothetical lexeme *djukegir*. First and foremost, the modern Evenki language does not know such a word, instead Evenkis say *jukagir* (Prokopjeva, personal communication) and historically both Evens and Evenkis used the word *bulen* ‘enemy’ to refer to Yukaghirs (Okladnikov 1955:289, Robbek and Robbek 2005:64). It seems unlikely that Evenkis would substitute the Russian distorted loanword borrowed from Evenki for their own original term, if it had ever existed. On the other hand, one cannot completely exclude the reverse borrowing. Apart from the apparent lack of a record of the word *djukegir* there is one little obstacle more to embrace wholeheartedly the ‘icy’ theory. It is not impossible to have the sequence <dju> in Russian word-initially. This raises a question why the word was not borrowed by Russians in its original form.

As for the origin of the autonym *wadul* used by the speakers of TY, there is no full clarity either. According to what is sometimes called a popular belief existing among Yukaghirs themselves it means ‘strong’ (e.g. Batjanova and Turaev 2010). This etymology – apart from the fact that it reflects indigenous understanding and thus should be taken seriously – is quite reasonable for linguistic reasons. In modern TY there is a verbal root *war*- ‘to be firm’, ‘to be hardy’, which Nikolaeva (2006:449) traces back along with the KY cognate *ad* with the same meaning to the reconstructed form *waδ*. Even in the contemporary language the sounds [r] and [d] are in free variation after nasals, e.g. *janre* ~ *jande* ‘goose’, *memdej-* ~ *memrej-* ‘to hand in’. If one assumes such

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25 This suffix is listed in Vasilevič (1958:751). Keeping in mind Tugolukov’s (1979:5) remark that the suffix –gir, typical of Tungusic clan names expresses multitude, one may be tempted to speculate that –r is the plural marker. According to the morphophonological rules of Evenki (Vasilevič 1958:671, Konstantinova 1964:42) the stem this allomorph of the plural marker is attached to should ends in *n* which is replaced by the plural ending. This would result in the underlying suffix –gin preceding the plural ending. And indeed, there is such a suffix in the Sym and Nepa dialects of Evenki. In the former it derives denominal nouns denoting ‘a woman belonging to a specific clan’, in the latter it produces the meaning ‘a member of an organization’ (Vasilevič 1958:751). Thus the composition of the hypothetical word *djukegir* is as follows: *djuke* (root) + *gin* (derivational suffix) + *r* (inflectional suffix).

26 Here it could be noted that at least one more possible etymology for the first half of the ethnonym ‘Yukaghir’ may be suggested: in Even, the Tungusic language spoken by the closest geographical neighbours of Yukaghirs, there is a word *djukak* ‘neighbour’.

27 Admittedly, words beginning with <dju> are extremely rare in Russian even if one counts the loans in, but they do exist. Dal’ (1998) lists at least two such words for which no foreign etymology is proposed by Vasmer (1953) and a few more Vasmer (1953) did not deal with. Ironically, according to Dal’ (1998) in the variety of Russian spoken in the Vladimir region there is a word *djuka* ‘taciturn or sullen person’, which almost fully matches the Evenki root *djuke* phonetically.

28 Jochelson ([1926] 2005:47) was probably the first scholar to point out this explanation. He derived the KY autonym *odul* from the verb stem *at*- ‘to be strong/powerful’.
an alternation to have once existed between \textit{war-} and \textit{*wad-}, a derivation of \textit{wadul} from the latter variant does not seem far fetched. A weak point of this analysis is that instances of this alternation in intervocalic position are not known for modern TY. An arguably related verb \textit{wadurči-}, with the variant \{d\}, has the meaning ‘to make efforts (to act properly, in a good way)’, ‘to endeavor’, expressing thus a concept that has to do with exerting (mental) force. Consequently, it seems to belong to the semantic field of the verb \textit{war-}/\textit{*wad-} ‘to be firm’, ‘to be strong’, making the assumed alternation [\textit{r}]/[\textit{d}] in this verb more plausible.

Another attempt to explain the etymology of the designation \textit{wadul} is to connect it with the listener-proximal demonstrative \textit{aduŋ}. The intended meaning is assumed to be ‘the local one/the one of this place’ (http://lingsib.iea.ras.ru/ru/languages/yukagir.shtml, accessed on 31.01.12). Burykin (2011:391) seeks to substantiate a similar interpretation turning to words like \textit{wayane} ‘one’s own/of one’s kin’ and \textit{wayariil} ‘native/indigene/forefather’.

1.3 Origin of the ethnicity ‘Yukagir’ and interactions with the neighbouring peoples

Yukaghirs are considered to be autochthons of Eastern Siberia. According to the prevalent opinion, their forefathers settled there in the Neolithic, which has additionally been confirmed by the finding that the ornaments on the traditional Yukaghir caftan parallel the neolithic petroglyphes in Yakutia (Žukova 2010:315). Early researchers, such as Jochelson, grouped modern Yukaghirs, Chukchi and Koryaks together as the so called ‘americanoid peoples’ and believed that they were secondary immigrants from the New World (Jochelson 1928:44 cited by Krejnovič 1958:6).

Yukaghirs were exposed to the influence of other peoples for a long period of time. The traces of other cultures manifested themselves in that of Yukaghirs so obviously that Jochelson ([1926] 2005:51) regarded them as a mixed ethnos. The process of mutual assimilation had advanced so far in his view that it was impossible to speak of the Yukaghir people as opposed to the Tungus people. In fact, Jochelson ([1926] 2005:50, 92-91) even claimed that the forefathers of the people whose language is the object of the present study were essentially yukaghirized Tungus, who appropriated the Yukaghir autonym and adopted the Yukaghir language\textsuperscript{29}. He tried to substantiate this radical opinion by the fact that the so called forest Yukaghirs living in the upper reaches of Kolyma and its tributaries, who spoke KY, did not count the Yukaghirs inhabiting the tundra among \textit{oduls}, which is the Yukaghir autonym used by forest Yukaghirs. Ironically, the tundra Yukaghirs considered their southern Yukaghir relatives Tungus. All my principal informants are only half Yukaghir by descent. The other half is represented by a parent who was either a yukaghirized Even or Yakut. From the 17\textsuperscript{th} century on, Yukaghirs have been in intense contact with Russians. Along with Itelmens and sea shore Koryaks they were very receptive to the Orthodox Christianity brought along by Russian settlers. Christianization of Yukaghirs promoted intermarriages with Russians (Batjanova

\textsuperscript{29} The irony of this situation is enhanced by the fact that the members of the numerically strongest Tungus clan that was assimilated by Yukaghirs called themselves \textit{Waqaqaril} (Jochelson [1926] 2005:92), which is most probably a distorted form of \textit{wayariil} ‘the name of a truly Yukaghir clan of the tundra’ or ‘indigenous’ (Kurilov 2001:59).
and Turaev 2010:16) and contributed to the further watering down of their ethnos. This secondary assimilation increased as a result of a reinforced migration of representatives of non-indigenous peoples to the Russian North during the years of its industrial development in the 20th century (Batjanova and Turaev 2010:17).

As for the linguistic influence, already on the threshold of the 19th and 20th century it was significant (Jochelson [1926] 2005:90). This influence could generally be characterized as a process of assimilation, which went both ways. While the Yukaghirs populating the tundra between Kolyma and Alazeya, the core region where TY is spoken nowadays, preserved their language and imposed it on the arriving Tungusic tribes, the Yukaghirs living between Indigirka and Yana had been fully assimilated by Tungus and kept only a certain number of Yukaghir words. Further westwards, beyond Yana, the assimilated Yukaghirs underwent together with the Tungus, who assimilated them earlier, a secondary assimilation, adopting the Yakut language. Eastwards of Kolyma, only a small number of Chuvans, representing a branch of the Yukaghir folk, were roaming together with Chukchis at the times of Jochelson’s ([1926] 2005:30) visit and dissolved subsequently in that latter people. Along with the nomadic Chuvans a group of Chuvans and Yukaghirs settled along the Anadyr River together with Russians.

TY has borrowings from the neighboring Tungusic languages, obvious ones on the lexical level and potential ones in the grammar, e.g. the future tense suffix –te. It is not surprising for a language to borrow a word from another language, but when the loans represent items from the basic vocabulary it must be recognized that the recipient language was under a strong influence of the donor language. Some of the core kin terms of TY are borrowings from Even/Evenki: en’ie < en’e/enii; amaa < ama/amii, amaa

1.4 Area inhabited by Yukaghirs: previously and nowadays

Yukaghirs are believed (Levin and Potapov 1956:885, Gurvič 1966:11, Okladnikov et. al. 1968:409) to have occupied vast stretches of land in Siberia extending from the lower reaches of Lena in the west to the basin of the Anadyr River in the east. There are indications that Yukaghirs spread westwards even further, as far as the river Olenek (Gurvič 1966:14). An opinion (ibid.), supported by Okladnikov (et al. 1968:409), is maintained that the spatial intrusion of the Tungus people between Yukaghirs and Samoyedic peoples is a recent event, which entails that Yukaghirs and Samoyeds shared a border running presumably along the rivers Kheta and Khatanga River, and that is the eastern porch of the Taimyr Peninsula. Latitudinally, Yukaghirs occupied the area between the coast of the Arctic Ocean and the upper reaches of Jana, Indigirka and Kolyma. According to some estimates, they dwelled as far as Vitim in the south (Okladnikov 1955:292). Toponymy also corroborates the assumption that the forefathers of the Yukaghirs inhabited the banks of the Lena, one of the three major Siberian rivers along with Ob and Yenisei in the west. In my opinion, Burykin (2001:80) offers a convincing testimony for that: the Yukaghir words jojl ‘steep bank (of a river)’ and enu

30 To what extant this process can affect the ethnic self-determination is illustrated by the emergence of Kamchadals, who are the descendants of such intermarriages between Itelmens and Russians. Kamchadals demanded for themselves the status of a separate indigenous folk and were granted it in 2000 (Batjanova and Turaev 2010:14).

31 The homophonous form amaa exists in Tokka and lengra subdialects.
‘river’. The combination of these two words can be traced in the Yakut name for Lena, namely *Joljujone*. Further apparently Yukaghir hydronyms in that area (e.g. *Marcha* < *morqe* ‘dwarf birch’) solidify this etymology. Even for the toponym Baikal a speculative Yukaghir etymology was suggested by Burykin (2001:80): the name could be derived from the TY word *wajjuol* ‘wood washed ashore’. Apart from the lack of convincing linguistic proof, a potential objection against this assumption is the fact that in KY the corresponding lexeme is *pierienzaa* (Spiridonov 1997). Baikal Lake is situated closer to the area where KY is spread. Therefore, if the name of the lake were a Yukaghir word, it would be natural to expect it in KY too. The approximate eastern border of the area once inhabited by Yukaghirs can be drawn as the line connecting the eastern shore of the Chaun Bay and Penzhina river continuing further south in the vicinity of the Sea of Okhotsk (Burykin 2001). The southern limit to which Yukaghirs extended the area of their dwelling is uncertain. Burykin (2001:81) points out an old name of the Anyuy river, a tributary of Amur, which is Dondon and believes that it is of Yukaghir origin. The coast of the Arctic Ocean forms the natural northernmost edge of *terra iucagirica*.

Ethnographic archeology confirms the onomastic findings and pushes the frontiers of the Yukaghir land yet further. One sees a link between the ancestors of Yukaghirs and the late Paleolithic cultures spread as far as Taimyr Peninsula in the west, Anadyr River in the east and the area to the west of Baikal in the south (Batjanova and Turaev 2010:14).

Nowadays Yukaghirs mainly live in three districts of the Republic Sakha (Yakutia): Verkhnekolymsk, Nizhnekolymsk and Allaikha. Apart from that they reside in Anadyr and Bilibino districts of Chukotka as well as in Srednekan district of Magadan region (Batjanova and Turaev 2010:13). Those speaking TY are confined to Nizhnekolymsk district shown on the first map on the following page (see the end of section 1.6 for the details of their distribution within the district). The second map roughly locates the area (black oval) where TY is spoken in northern Eurasia.
1.5 Economics

Originally, Yukaghirs were hunters and fishers. The only domesticated animal the ancient Yukaghirs kept was the dog. The tundra Yukaghirs adopted from the neighboring Evens reindeer herding at some point in the history and since then reindeer breeding has played a crucial role in their economy. During the Soviet time this sector of production reached its height. Reindeer herds of 20 000 heads were not unusual. After the liberalization of the Russian economy in the beginning of the 90s the overall economic decline in the country also affected the Yukaghirs and the size of an average reindeer suffered a tenfold decrease. Nowadays, some Yukaghirs subsist entirely on fish. Luckily, the rivers and lakes between Kolyma and Alazeya teem with different sorts of high quality fish. Some Yukaghirs, including most of my informants, who maintained the necessary knowledge and manual skills, supplement their income by sewing traditional fur clothes to order, privately or organized in small ateliers. A few men provide for their households by searching for mammoth tusks in the tundra and selling them for good money to some semi-legal middlemen. Some Yukaghirs, just as representatives of other minorities living in the Alazeya tundra, have no regular income or simply remain jobless and have to live off their elders’ pensions. Of course, the very remoteness of the Kolyma region and the harsh climate (the territory between Yana and Kolyma is the coldest region in Russia with -71°C as the lowest temperature ever recorded in the northern hemisphere) aggravates things yet more.

An essential aspect of every economy is transportation, and transportation has for years been a serious problem for the inhabitants of the Nizhnekolymsk district. In the Soviet times there was a daily plane connection between Andryushkino and Cherski, which is the administrative center of the Nizhnekolymsk district situated some 300 km. away from the former, allowing one to take care of the necessary business and return home on the same day, now only irregular helicopter (about twice a month or even less) flights take place between these two settlements. Since this frequency does not even approximately satisfy the needs of the local populations, one has to register for a prospective flight well in advance. This does not always secure a seat because it can never be excluded that in the meantime an official books the same flight and takes the seat of an ordinary passenger, who will then end up on the waiting list. For this reason, people sometimes cannot fly out for months. People desiring to fly from Cherski further, to the republican capital Yakutsk, are confronted with a different problem. There are regular flights Cherski – Yakutsk three times a week, but the fares are so incredibly high – up to 23 000 rubles (almost 600 euros) for a one way ticket – that many people have to save money literally for months because they simply cannot afford it. I met a young

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32 The aerial connection is essential for Andryushkino, where most of the tundra Yukaghirs live, because apart from the period from February till May when the ice on the lakes becomes thick enough to guarantee a safe passage to buses and cars, the village can be reached only by flying or, in summer, by boat. This latter option can hardly be of much use, a quick look at the geographical map explains why.

33 By the time of my last field trip a return ticket cost already 52 000 rubles and the locals told me that there was a period when the price rose to 60 000 rubles, after which people filed outraged complaints with the administrative authorities and the airplane company had to reduce the price again.

34 The average salary in Nizhnekolymsk district amounts to 36 000 rubles. It ranges from some 15 000 rubles to slightly below 100 000 rubles (Jakutija 05.03.2013:2).
father of two in Cherski whose monthly earnings hardly exceeded 5000 rubles. Such people are practically prisoners in their own district.

Food supply, the key aspect of economy, is also deficient in the Nizhnekolymsk district. My informants told me that in the era of planned economy fresh vegetables and fruits were common products on the shop shelves in Andryushkino and available for a moderate price. Today it is almost impossible to find them for a reasonable price, if at all. Therefore many people are compelled to grow their own vegetables.

The bad economic situation is one of the most important causes for the reluctance of the Yukaghirs of Andryushkino and Cherski to initiate and sustain a planned and steady revival campaign for their language. As one of my key informants told me, it is hard to think of saving the language as long as Yukaghirs are preoccupied with securing their daily bread.

1.6 Sociolinguistic situation

Jochelson (1900:xv) underestimated the living force of the Yukaghir language prophesying its possible death within several decades and reconfirming his opinion just a few years later with a rather categorical remark: ‘the days of the Yukaghir language are really counted’ (Jochelson 1905:370). Yet it has to be admitted (and, sadly, so do the native speakers themselves) that the language is moribund and only a special, determined effort can cardinally change its fate of a dying idiom. Kibrik (1991:267) placed Yukaghir into group III on his five-degree scale of endangerment among the minority languages spoken in Russia. He characterizes the languages pertaining to that group as ‘seriously threatened’. In his classification, group III contains languages at a crossroad: they can either transit to group II and become a ‘terminally ill’ (Kibrik 1991:264) language, or start showing more promising signs of recovery than just the introduction of lessons at school and the increased ethnic self-consciousness of its speakers. As for my own observations, the ethnic self-identification often does not go much further than the mere recognition of one’s ethnic origin. Occasional gatherings may serve to remind one of it and celebrate the one or the other prominent son of the Yukaghir people but do not contribute decisively to the cause of actually saving the language. There is a hope that this will change as a Council of Yukaghir Seniors was formed recently in Cherski to coordinate the efforts of the TY community necessary to promote their language among its members. It also has to be stated that teaching Yukaghir at school in Andryushkino cannot promote the revival of the language on its own because it is perceived as foreign by the children though they may officially or even sincerely call it native. Children must speak the language at home. In the case of TY it would be with one’s grandparents since the generation of today’s schoolchildren’s parents can be called ‘the lost generation’ in the linguistic sense with respect to the knowledge of the language of the ancestors. If the mother tongue is not used at home, it is like a foreign language to the children and in that sense is no different from English, which is taught in Andryushkino school too. In fact, sometimes children even take their Yukaghir lessons as an imposition. A teacher in Andryushkino told me of a pupil who told her that she would gladly learn about old customs and the traditional clothing but was not going to study declension and conjugation tables because she did not see any purpose. To my mind, this is a crucial point. If the state is to play any role in the preservation of TY, creating a possibility to
speak TY is obviously not sufficient since such a possibility has been there for decades by now. I expect that no tangible results will be seen unless and until a necessity to employ TY in the daily life appears. The lack of such a necessity and the habit of using one of the two lingua franca in Andryushkino, which are Yakut for the elderly and Russian for the young in that village, have according to some of my informants led – and I have witnessed it myself – to the unnatural default choice of Yakut, even when elderly Yukaghirs encounter one another. They all understand that it is up to them to keep their language alive but often there is lack of determination and motivation to undertake something on a regular basis to achieve that goal. In this sense the private efforts of one of my major informants, V.N. Tretyakov, residing in Cherski are highly praiseworthy. On his own initiative he has organized regular Yukaghir lessons on Sundays, which since recently take place in the school building. Since Cherski is considered a Russian settlement, Yukaghir does not form a part of the regular school curriculum there and for the Yukaghir families living there the initiative of V.N. Tretyakov is a welcome opportunity at least to initiate their children into the riches of their language. V.N Tretyakov told me about his plans to organize a nomadic school during summer holidays, where children would be immersed for a period of time into TY, which, at least temporarily, will create the necessity to resort to TY. The inception of this promising undertaking presupposes adequate financing, of course.

What were the factors that led to the present situation of TY? The natural cause that should not be underestimated is the numerical depletion of the Yukaghir people due to epidemics and exploitation under the Tsarist regime causing impoverishment and sometimes famine. Their number diminished over the centuries from the speculatively estimated 9 000 to only 754 according to the census in 1897 (Donskoj 1996:23). The lowest demographic point, 442 people according to the census in 1959 (Donskoj 1996:23) was reached as a result of the politics during the collectivization and the subsequent decades, characterized in many instances by a blatant denial of the very existence of the ethnos ‘Yukaghir’, whose representatives were not recognized as such and were registered as Evens. It is clear that such an attitude of the state authorities was a heavy blow for the prestige of TY. There was another manifestation of depriving TY of its value in the eyes of its speakers that was particularly detrimental. From the 1930s on it was customary to give one’s children to the boarding schools where schoolchildren spent five days a week most part of the year. The minority languages were banned in those schools and children were punished by e.g. being enclosed in dark rooms alone for speaking their respective minority languages. For the sociolinguistic behavior of the children this was extremely harmful. All these misdeeds conditioned a situation in which even despite positive demographic dynamics resulting in a sizable increase of the Yukaghir ethnic population up to 114235 people by the time of the census in 1989 (Donskoj 1996:23) and up to 150936 in 2002 (Batjanova and Turaev 2010:12), only about 30% of Yukaghirs mastered their language (Kurilov 2005:20).

35 Along with the natural cause, the growth of the number of Yukaghirs was a bureaucratic act of restoration of the Yukaghir nationality of those falsely registered earlier as Evens or Yakuts.
36 Compared to other minorities of north-eastern Russia, this figure is rather low. Fewer in number are only Chuvans and Aleuts. If one considers that American Aleuts count around 6 000 people (Batjanova and Turaev 2010:13) and the fact that Chuvans have lost their language, Yukaghirs are the smallest minority in the area still speaking their idiom. Their only potential ‘rival’ in this sad competition can be eight Kereks living in Kamchatka, if one acknowledges them as a folk distinct from Koryaks.
Another factor contributing to the loss of a language stressed by Kibrik (1991:260) and fully applicable to Yukaghirs was and is the living with other peoples including those whose languages enjoyed higher prestige, above all Yakut, but also Russian. This fact is the more disappointing as during the collectivization Yukaghirs had founded their own kolkhoz, which became prosperous in the beginning of the 1950s and opened its own primary school (Kurilov 2005:19-20). Yukaghirs were the majority in Tustakh-Sen, the central settlement of the kolkhoz, and determined their environment culturally and linguistically. It is only as the result of the decision made by Khrushchev to abolish small settlements and collective enterprises and combine them in larger ones that tundra Yukaghirs live in a multi-ethnic community where they are a minority.

At the present moment roughly 60 (Odé, personal communication) Yukaghirs are able to communicate in TY to varying degrees. Most of them live in the village of Andryushkino together with Yakuts, Evens and a small number of Russians and Chukchis. About one third of them live in Cherski, a Russian dominated settlement and a few speakers dwell in the village of Kolymskoe, where they are greatly outnumbered by Chukchis. Five speakers reside in Yakutsk, the capital of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia).

Unfortunately, as alluded above, there is very little willingness on the part of the native speakers to cultivate TY in their families. I know of only one senior lady who made deliberate attempts to pass the language on to one of her grandsons and the boy is said to have achieved quite some oral skills. It can only be hoped that he will maintain them since he is planning to enroll in a military school, where he certainly will not have opportunities to practice his ‘mother’ tongue. There is only one mother who taught her little daughter TY as long as she lived in a hut on the tundra. However, upon moving to Andryushkino she stopped doing that and switched to Russian for practical reasons. Only after her daughter had become proficient in the state language, would she resume teaching her TY, she said to me. The above-mentioned organizer of the Sunday school does not teach his child TY under the pretext of having to concentrate his efforts to care for the TY linguistic community as a whole. The most graphic example of the negative language attitude on personal level I could observe in a senior male Yukaghir, who gave his reasons why his granddaughter should learn Yakut and English. When I pointed out to him that younger Yukaghirs’ exclusive occupation with other languages will deprive TY of chances of survival, he just emphatically waved it away with his hand.

1.7 Methodology


‘If they are to be state-of-the-art, they focus on primary data without favoring particular genres or text types, have an explicit concern for both accountability and long-term preservation of the data, and are the product of interdisciplinary teams working in close cooperation with and direct involvement of the speech community.’
Zúñiga (2012:172) goes on to say that

‘By contrast, secondary data consist of material found in specialized studies and reference grammars. The current consensus in descriptive work is that such sources should not constitute the sole, or principal, foundation on which the description is based.’

On the following page Zúñiga (2012:173) comments that

‘Wälchli (2007) and Epps (2011) rightly point out that intralinguistic structural variation has tended to be underrepresented in traditional descriptions, which have favored normalized representations of typical patterns and neglected unsystematic or infrequent structures. […] Recent studies emphasize the need for less restrictive data collection techniques that allow “to support claimed generalizations with multiple empirical sources of converging evidence, including observations of ecologically natural language use” Bresnan (2007:302).’

Finally, it is stressed in the article that language description should be ‘typologically informed’. Zúñiga (2012:177) specifies referring to Epps (2011:648) that

‘the description must meet the dual challenge of enabling and facilitating crosslinguistic comparison while remaining “true to the languages themselves, without forcing them into ill-fitted predetermined categories”.’

I have striven, within the limits of my capacity, to highlight interesting typological facts in the grammar of TY. Upon reading the thesis the reader will make his own judgment whether the above recommendations have sufficiently been taken into consideration.

As far as the sources of linguistic data are concerned, the use of secondary sources was marginal. The few quoted examples were an inevitable measure in the absence of comparable examples from the available corpus. Earlier primary sources, e.g. Jochelson (1900) or those found in Jochelson ([1926] 2005), Krejnovič (1958, 1982), Maslova (2001) did not make part of the available corpus. They were excluded from it for the sake of originality of the present work and also because the thesis is a synchronic description of TY as it is spoken nowadays in Andryushkino and Cherski. A quick look into the TY texts published by Jochelson (1900, [1926] 2005) makes one realize how different that TY was from the modern idiom. The differences include lexical items, morphological devices and syntactic constructions. For instance, in the very first sentence of the first tale in Jochelson ([1926] 2005:383) the word lači ‘lived’ occurs, which is unattested in the modern TY. The equivalent modern verb forms are l’ej and sayanej. The second sentence of the same text, which expresses possession, contains the possessee in the instrumental:
Comparable sentences are formed today without such an adjunct:

(2b) \textit{Tuy apanalaa-n’e-j pełdudie kin quod’eduon’iel’el’i.}
\textit{Tuŋ apanalaa-n’e-j pełdudie ki-n quod’eduon’iel’el-ŋi.}
\textit{That old man and the old woman had two sons.}

In the textual material the nowadays obsolete accusative ending –\textit{γale} is found, as well as a non attested converb form \textit{ireleŋ} ‘having tied’ (Jochelson [1926] 2005:384). Already from these superficial observations it is obvious that either TY underwent a good deal of language change in the last hundred years – and diachronic phenomena do not necessarily fit into a synchronic grammar as this one – or another variety of TY is described, inexistent at present.

The major source of the primary data for this grammar were the transcripts of different audio recordings made by Cecilia Odé in 2009 and a book of memoirs of a senior female Yukaghir deceased in the 80’s of the past century, referred to as Kurilov and Odé (2012), and my own field notes. More than two thirds of the examples come from these three sources. The examples from the transcripts as well as field notes appear in the thesis without reference\(^{38}\). The transcripts include monologues (tales, descriptions, and recollections), a long dialogue, short written pieces of autobiographical character, rich with discourse, and a telephone conversation. Around one quarter of the examples are taken from the second edition of Kurilov’s (2001) dictionary\(^{39}\). I treat those as

\(^{37}\) The original spelling is retained here. The glossing of \textit{marqilek} is tentative. The instrumental case can be employed to mark direct objects in KY (Maslova 2003c:95). (2a) does not contain a transitive verb, which could have a direct object, but this is not an obstacle to consider \textit{kin marqilek} ‘two daughters’ a direct object because semi-transitive clauses are rather wide-spread in TY (see 4.2.3.2 and 4.2.3.2.4). Particularly denominal verbs derived by the suffix –\textit{n’e}, employed in (2a), can be predicates of semi-transitive clauses:

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{Tudel taŋ’e-le wiejuel morawn’e-j.}
\textit{Tudel taŋ’e-le wieŋol moraw-n’e-j.}
\textit{He must do it.}
\end{enumerate}

\(^{38}\) Examples of single words found as entries in Kurilov (1990, 2001) also lack references unless they are meant to provide contrast with the data from some other sources. In such a case the source of examples from transcripts and field notes is indicated too.

\(^{39}\) To facilitate the search of these examples in the dictionary not only the information about the page is provided by also about the entry under which the example sentence is given.

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primary data because they are not analyzed apart from being provided with translations, part of speech labels, short comments on the meaning in case of modal particles and indications of the aspectual, voice etc. value of verb forms. Besides, entries no do not appear in the dictionary to illustrate a grammatical point. Therefore, the analysis of those examples is mainly mine and can be considered original. I would generally turn to Kurilov (2001) in the absence of comparable data in the major sources mentioned above. A noticeable number of sentences were taken from a book with children stories (Kurilov 1994). Occasionally I drew on the material contained in the volume on TY folklore consisting of tales and legends (Kurilov 2005) and from a similar but far less voluminous compilation published 15 years earlier (Kurilov 1991). Any other referred source was used only sparsely. I took the liberty to alter the translations of the original sources when it seemed appropriate to me, without explicitly signaling it in each case.

Alongside more or less natural speech, elicitation has contributed essentially to figuring out the intricacies of the language use. The medium language during elicitation sessions was always Russian.

Principal informants were all above 65 years of age at the time of the completion of this thesis and in full command of TY as well as Russian. Female speakers were overrepresented, in the proportion 4:1.

1.8 A note on the spelling and glossing system adopted in this work

Words of foreign (with respect to English) origin, primarily geographic names in Russia, that are parts of the English text of this book are spelt according to the traditional use or the common English transliteration system, e.g. Yenisei, Yakutsk, Andryushkino etc. All examples given in languages other than English are italicized. Examples from languages with a well established writing system based on the Latin script are given in their original spelling. The same holds for examples from any language quoted from Anglophone sources.

Non-Yukaghir words and word segments occurring in Russian sources – in the Cyrillic-based script that is – are spelt according to the German scientific transliteration of the Cyrillic script, e.g. Joljune for Йолюйонэ, djuke for дюкэ, etc. Whenever this is insufficient, the IPA symbols are employed, e.g. etelat. In case one and the same word is not spelt identically in different sources, e.g. missing or present vowel length signs, the spelling of whichever source the word is taken from gets transliterated.

40 For one, having graduated at Mainz University, I was naturally more accustomed to using the German system when I began my work on the thesis and it would have been impractical to acquire another one. Secondly, German linguistic and philosophic thought influenced Russian academicians of the first half of the 20th century arguably more strongly than other European linguistic schools – after all an outstanding Russian linguist Trubetzkoy spent three years in Leipzig studying the work of Junggrammatiker and resided in Austria during his most productive years – which might be the reason why Russian-speaking linguists seem to prefer a transliteration system resembling the German one. Since I am a native Russian, it was a natural choice for me from this viewpoint too. Finally, the German scientific transliteration is almost identical with the transliteration system practiced in academic libraries in the Netherlands, the host country and facilitator of this project.

41 A divergence from the German scientific transliteration is the decision to use the regular Latin letter e instead of the symbol è employed to transliterate the Cyrillic э.
Yukaghir words are spelt following the conventions adopted in the existing Anglophone literature on the Yukaghir language, e.g. Maslova (2003c), the differences being the use of the Greek letter γ instead of h for the voiced uvular fricative [β], the letter ć instead of the symbol t’ for the affricate [tʃ] and double vowels instead of the macron symbol to represent long vowels.\footnote{This particular point applies also for transliterating examples from other languages taken from Russian sources.}

In this work the guidelines of the Leipzig glossing rules are followed as described at \url{http://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/pdf/LGR08.02.05.pdf} (accessed on 24.03.2013). Whenever there are morphophonemic alternations in the target language resulting in segmentation difficulties or affecting the number of segments involved, a line with the underlying form is inserted between the surface form and the gloss, and it is in this line that words are broken down into morphemes. If segmentation does not pose a problem or, conversely, is not possible at all, the first line of the examples itself is parsed as far as possible and glossed. This inconsistence is justified by the desire to save space by omitting the additional line where clarity cannot be compromised by its absence. In the additional line with the underlying form the phonemic transcription is given, in its absence the transcription is, naturally, orthographic.

Finally, a remark on quotes from the Russian sources, which are numerous: they all are given in my own translation.