

Ethnolinguistic Nominations of Mythological Figures (demonologems) in the Kalmyk Language

*Nyudlya Chetyrovn*a Ochirova*, *Nina Nikolaevna* Sharapova, *Inga Sergeevna* Mandzhieva, *Merdan Yashuzakovich* Khamraev, and *Selbi Yashuzakovna* Khamrayeva

Kalmyk State University named after B.B.Gorodovikov, 11, Pushkin St., Elista, 358000, Republic of Kalmykia, Russian Federation

Abstract. Demonology ideas that date from the oldest and most stable folklore and mythological traditions are emphasized in multiple ethnic cultures. An early form of religion directly coupled with mythology is represented by the black faith of the Mongolian and, more broadly, Central Asians, which evolved from many different beliefs bequeathed by ancestors (belief in the forces of space and nature, in the souls of dead ancestors, totemic ancestors, etc.). It made people perceive the world around as a set of elements dynamically influencing their lives where each element has its own origin, its own spirit somewhat independent, which they worship and appease by means of sacrifice, incantation and primordial magic. Mythologization as a certain tendency of consciousness was preserved throughout all historical stages shaping the ethnic Mongolian society, including the Kalmyks. The paper discusses the naming of mythological characters (demonologems or demonims), defines the groups of nominations for 'lower mythology' characters with a surreal denotation that does not exist in real life. The study aims to feature the ethnolinguistic functioning of demonology glossary in the Kalmyk language and to identify its significance in modern linguistic consciousness. The glossary is basically denoted through ethnocultural stereotypical ideas about demonology born in the minds of native speakers. The most productive are the nominative groups of mythical creatures determined by their habitat, by deleterious effects that malevolent entities can have, etc. Evaluative nominations are based on demonologemes that have a negative connotation fixed in the language.

Keywords: the Kalmyks, intellectual culture, mythological figures, demonologems

1 Introduction

An early form of religion, directly related to mythology, is represented by the black faith of the Mongolian and, more broadly, Central Asian peoples, which has developed from many different beliefs bequeathed by ancestors (belief in the forces of space and nature, in the souls of dead ancestors, totem first ancestors, etc.). In it, the surrounding world was perceived as a set of elements that actively influenced a person's life where each element had its beginning, its spirit, which had a certain independence, which they worshiped, appeasing them with the help of sacrifice, spells, and primitive magic. Mythologization as a certain inclination of consciousness is preserved at all historical stages of the development of the ethnic society of the Mongolian peoples [1].

Demonology glossary comprises lexical units (demonologems or demonims) consisting of a complex of folk ideas about evil entities (demons, spirits, etc.) coming from the other world (spirit realm), as well as various phenomena, actions associated therewith. In modern linguistics, this stratum of terminology is studied through several directions, namely ethnolinguistic by N.I. Tolstoy, S.M. Tolstaya, L.N. Vinogradova, E.L. Berezovich;

linguoculturological by V.V. Krasnykh, N.I. Konovalova, O.V. Abyyakaya, I.V. Kuznetsova (Kirilova) and others; etymological by V.N. Toporov, V.V. Ivanov and others; areal by O.A. Cherepanova and others. In Kalmyk and, more broadly, Mongolian studies, the vocabulary denoting folklore figures was fragmentarily addressed in linguistic papers by G. Ramstedt, B.Kh. Todaeva, G.Ts. Pyurbueev and others; in ethnographic, folklore and religious studies – by U.D. Dushan, W.E. Erdniev, S.Yu. Neklyudov, E.B. Ovalov, T.G. Basangova, E.P. Bakaeva, B.A. Bicheev and others [2–7].

2 Problem Statement

S.Yu. Neklyudov, the famous Mongolian scholar, the founder of the national school of comparative typological folklore, notes that demonological narrative traditions reflect attributes residing in each culture and era. The general interest in folk demonology does not wane even today, since this folklore genre is a "universal", "archetypal" and, on the other hand, promising, rapidly developing trend. Despite insignificant transformations, the subject and object of representation invariably retain the most important

* Corresponding author: ochimudlya@mail.ru

structural, semantic and functional features that refer to such basic human emotions as fear, curiosity, surprise, etc. [8, 9].

Traditionally, the religious and mythological system is represented by two main levels. “Higher mythology” is represented by a combination of “higher powers” and related phenomena that have a status of divine, whereas “lower mythology” is represented by someone from the other world, who are in direct close contacts with the world of people. Therefore, these mythologized figures become objects of depiction in non-sacralized genres of folklore narratives (non-fairytale prose) like stories, legends, folkloric accounts, true stories, etc. [10].

3 Research Questions

In linguistic literature, a unified system of terms and concepts denoting units of mythological vocabulary has not yet been developed. In addition, in works devoted to the study of representation and the expression of mythical ideas, the authors do not always give a clear definition of the terms used, which often leads to confusion about concepts.

The study of mythological vocabulary, in particular mythologemes denoting fairy tale characters and evil spirits, is carried out, of course, mainly by folklore, ethnography, ethnolinguistics, dialectology, and lexicology.

The study of specific terms and their interpretations are interpreted mainly based on the traditional worldview of the people, so answers to many questions can be found by referring to the traditional beliefs and folklore of the Kalmyks [11]. For example, various folk divinations, prophetic dreams, prohibitions, signs, beliefs, etc., which are part of the linguistic picture of the world and reveal the content of archaic beliefs at the level of everyday life, are valuable material for linguistic research of ethno-actual vocabulary.

4 Purpose of the Study

The study aims to outline the ethnolinguistic functioning of demonology glossary in the Kalmyk language and to determine its meaning in modern linguistic consciousness. Interest in sacral models of various rites and rituals, which reflect the traditional culture and centuries-old experience of the Kalmyks, who are part of the Mongolian language group, is dictated by the specific nature of ritual vocabulary and the need to preserve a valuable layer of terminology for further linguistic research.

5 Research Methods

Lyudmila Vinogradova, the famous Slavist, folklorist and ethnologist, produced the most famous classification represented by an ethnolinguistic model for describing terms related to folk demonology [12]. This form of classification focused on the ethnolinguistic interpretation of demonology figures is universal and, in

our opinion, can be used to arrange the nominations of mythological figures (demonologemes) in the Kalmyk language.

6 Findings

Mythologized images of people with supernatural abilities include *medl'ch* denoting someone sapient, aware (a person with special sacred knowledge); *ky khälädg* denoting someone knowing (seeing) people (a person with extrasensory abilities to see what is beyond other peoples' understanding); *äaldäch* denoting soothsayer (a person able to foresee the future); *belgch* denoting fortune teller; *dalch* denoting someone fortune-telling by the lamb shoulder; *shorch* denoting someone fortune-telling by a trihedral wand; *zadch* denoting someone causing rain, thunderstorm, bad weather, etc. with characteristic features that come within the relics of shamanism. In Kalmyk cultural traditions, the form of being chosen and the way of accepting a supernatural gift by such people are mainly hereditary, and therefore they are often forced to acquire these amazing abilities.

Thus, a person who performed the functions assigned, *zadch* denoting a ‘person with magical abilities to cause rain’, also knew how to stop it. There were several ways to cause rain: 1) the first method was that, having climbed up a hill, *zadch* uttered magic spells (*tärn*), followed by an indispensable ritual attribute *zad cholun* ‘a stone used to excite rain’ was put into the water or vice versa raised to the sky and in some cases brought to the fire; 2) the second way was not quite usual, whereby *zadch* took the snake by the tail, put its head into the water and pronounced some special magic spells. *Zadchs*’s amazing magical abilities were highly valued in folk culture and after death, following religious traditions, their bodies were cremated in the same way as representatives of the higher Buddhist clergy [13].

Notably, in folk culture, only those characters that have extremely negative meanings are considered demonic [14], and therefore many of the characters listed above are rather labelled positively, although they are directly referred to the relics of pagan beliefs.

Mythologized images of people who took a thoughtful decision to have a relationship with otherworldly forces include *khar säkystä* (*khar yzgin säkustä*) denoting someone ‘contacting the dark patrons’. Up to the 19th century, there are descriptions of the actions *bə* (*orh, cäkus duudjə, biidən orshuldg ilvtə kyn*) denoting a ‘shaman (a person with supernatural abilities to contact spirits during a ritual appeal – shamanistic ritual)’ and *udhn* (*bəhin ilvtə kyykd kyn*) denoting a ‘shaman, priestess of the cult of fire, sorceress’ [15]. Unlike the images of *tsahan säkystä* (*tsahan yzgin säkustä*) denoting someone ‘contacting the light patrons’ who performed rites of social significance, the functions of black shamans were reduced to some individual rites with an appeal to the “lower mythology” spirits [13].

Victims of evil spirits include *handgldg, hanrdg* denoting someone ‘demoniac, raging’; *shulmlsn, shulmta* denoting someone ‘devil-ridden’. Evicting demons, the devil is regarded as one of the oldest magical rituals in

the pre-Buddhist beliefs of the Kalmyks. According to some reports, one of exorcism practices was performed in an open area, away from people and residential settlements. Generally, having special sacred knowledge *bə* referred to as shaman, *medl'ch* denoting someone 'sapient, aware' or *kʏ khələdg* denoting someone 'knowing (seeing) people' cast out demons from an obsessed person with special magic spells and symbolic blows (with a whip, etc.). During the ceremony, those present must certainly cover their heads, because malevolent spiritual entities evicted from a person were believed to be looking for a new victim and could easily get inside a person through an uncovered parietal part of the head.

Mythologized images that can turn into animals – in the ancient Kalmyk beliefs and folklore there is a theme of werewolf (magical change of appearance), attributed to evil entities – *bird* referred to as 'werewolf'. The concept of transformation or reincarnation is one of the most widespread in the mythology of nearly all the peoples around the world, including the Mongolians, which reflects the ancient totemic views. The mythologeme of the reincarnation of a man into a wolf is especially popular [16].

There is an opinion that some *medl'ch* 'sapient, aware' or *kʏ khələdg* 'knowing (seeing) people', classified as *har səkusta* (*har ʏzgin səkusta*), have dark patrons in the form of zoomorphic entities or spirits capable of shapeshifting. Such people were popularly called *yamata lit.* 'possessing a goat' (i.e. having a patron – a spirit in the guise of a goat). Often in the conversations of old Kalmyks one could hear about the origin of certain domestic animals like *yaman* – *shulm tokhmta adusn boldmn* 'goat is an animal descended from malevolent spiritual entities, evil spirits', *mis* – *burkhna yosurta adusn*, while a cat, on the contrary, is considered an animal produced by a deity.

The Kalmyks believe that zoomorphism resides in the patron spirits of water (*lus*), earth, etc. A spirit-master of water appears in the form of *aəph-zahch* 'enormously big fish' or spirit-master of a territory is depicted in the form of *aəph-moha* 'a huge snake'. Most often, spirit-masters of the territory are not characterized as hostile to the world of people, but they are more likely indifferent to them. However, if you strongly anger the spirits of the territory, for example, by polluting water bodies, irrational use of land, destroying ancient relics, etc., they can cause various disasters like droughts, storms, floods, loss of livestock, disease and other misfortunes that were considered to result from the angry local spirits. In order to appease them, special rituals were performed, an *ova* 'mound' was erected, rituals of sacrifice were practiced (*ova taklhn*, *hazr taklhn*, *us taklhn*, etc.) [17].

Mythologized images of people – "double souls" *who have a second soul from a demon* – superstitious ideas about the multiplicity of souls and their different fates after a person leaves for another world are captured in ancient relic forms. Back then, our ancestors believed that a person has two souls: *hol əmn* 'the soul is the principal life force' and *ymsn* 'the soul is consciousness'. It is the "second" soul that merely

distinguishes a person from an animal. Nowadays there are some religious practices performed to protect health and vitality. Thus, if a person is seriously ill and is on the verge of life and death, *əmnə dolg* was performed – a rite of ransoming the soul from the spirits of the other world or *yms duudlhn* – a rite of invoking the soul, etc.

Souls of deceased relatives – *symn* "soul, spirit (ghost)". In the Kalmyk and, more broadly, the Mongolian tradition, there is an idea that after the death of a person, an unclean force appears from the hip (*tibia*) bone of the deceased – *bug, ad*; Mong. *bog/bug, ada* and turns into Kalm. *chotkr, erlg*; Mong. *chotgor/chutgur*, which only people with supernatural abilities and special sacred knowledge can deal with. Representatives of the other world are incorporeal and tend to move into a person. These demonologemes, among other things, are the spirits (ghosts) of deceased relatives. Such a ratio of the origin of a person and evil spirits from one bone (*yasn* 'bone', 'kin') gives a general idea of the relationship between living and dead members of the same kin [18].

Malevolent spiritual entities ("bad dead") – *erlg* 'evil spirits', 'malicious entities' – messengers of the Lord of the Underworld, the world of the dead (*Erlg nomin khan*) are basically the souls of people who died not in their beds or sinners. There are nine types of evil spirits that entered our world from another world, the so-called – *hazrin ʏisn mu* 'nine earthly demons' (*shulm, chotkr, erlg, donam/dogam, alms, sudr, zekkr, aal, birmn*). The main task of these demons is to do as much harm as possible to a person, for example, in the form of various diseases (*gem-shaltg*) and misfortunes (*zetkr, hothr*) and finally defeat, having moved into the body and capturing or displacing a human soul. In the Mongolian languages, various terms denoting evil spirits have almost the same meanings: Kalm. *chotkr, erlg*; Mong. *chotgor/chutgur, albin* – ghosts, wandering lights, leading travelers astray; Kalm. *shulm, ad*; Mong. *shulmas/sholmos, ada* – werewolf, demon, ghost, obsession; Kalm. *zetkr*; Mong. *totgor/tutger, dzedger* – evil spirits, obsession, demons of madness; Kalm. *aal*; Mong. *elee* – a spirit that portends and causes misfortune, a ghost, a wandering fire; Kalm. *birman, symn, syydr*; Mong. *dzagurada, harmyakhan* – ghosts (souls that did not receive another rebirth and remained between the worlds); Kalm. *donam/dogam, alms*; Mong. *kolchin* – an ugly demon, a ghost.

Dead people who have turned into mythologized figures ("good dead") – in the cultural traditions of the Mongolian peoples, beliefs have been preserved that the souls of dead people (usually male or female shamans) reincarnate into natural spirits – masters of a territory. The nature itself was believed to help souls find a good destiny. In particular, the soul buried on a mountain became the master spirit of that mountain; the souls of drowned people turned into water spirits; those who died in the caves later turned out to be cave spirits, those who got lost and remained forever in the forest became forest spirits, etc. [19]. The researchers note that the spirits or lords of the territory are often characterized by saving people from various troubles and misfortunes.

7 Conclusion

Thus, the ethnolinguistic model provided for describing demonology glossary, focused on the interpretation of mythical figures, encompasses an extensive sacral and cultural context, depicting all kinds of modifications of demonologemes based on field, folklore, lexicographic data and generalizing research.

Demonology glossary is arranged in the Kalmyk language based on the principle of “demonicity” (the degree of mythologization) concerning a person and the severity of characters’ harmful abilities. The system for describing demonological characters covers various areas of functioning of the otherworldly (impure) force: essence, attributes, relationship, genesis, loci, functions, etc. The glossary is basically denoted through ethnocultural stereotypical ideas about demonology born in the minds of native speakers. The most productive are the nominative groups of mythical creatures determined by their habitat, by deleterious effects that malevolent entities can have, etc. Evaluative nominations are based on demonologemes that have a negative connotation fixed in the language. The lexicon considered by us, as a whole, retains a stable position in the Kalmyk language and is of a general Mongolian character. Many word-building synonyms are demonstrated, despite the fact that today the lexical composition is inevitably subject to modifications under the influence of various linguistic and extralinguistic (extralinguistic) factors.

References

1. B.A. Bicheev, *Mythological and Religious Foundations for the Formation of the Ethnic Consciousness of the Kalmyks* (Stavropol, Stavropol State Univ., 2005)
2. T.G. Basangova, Demonological Characters in Kalmyk Folklore New Research of Tuva **2–3**, 269–278 (2011)
3. N.Ch. Ochirova, N.N. Sharapova, B.V. Barinova, Demonology glossary of the Kalmyk language: the nomination of characters. Bull. of the Kalmyk Univ. **1(53)**, 104–110 (2022)
4. M.V. Purbueva, Demonological characters in non-fairytale prose of the Buryats. Bull. of the Buryat State Univ. **10**, 288–293 (2010)
5. E.V. Sundueva, Characters of lower mythology in the Mongolian languages. Bull. of the Buryat State Univ. **10**, 158–161 (2015)
6. B.Kh. Todaeva, *Dictionary of the Oirats of Xinjiang (according to the versions of the song “Dzhangara” and the author's field notes)* (Elista, Kalmyk book publ. house, 2001)
7. L. Erdenebold, *Traditional beliefs of the Oirat-Mongols (late XIX – early XX century)* (Ulan-Ude, Publ. House of the Buryat Sci. Center SB RAS, 2012)
8. *Big Academic Mongolian-Russian Dictionary*. Vol. 1 (Moscow, Academia, 2001)
9. S.Yu. Neklyudov, Insight into the sphere of Mongolian demonology: a narration from an epic narrator. In: *Collection of articles on linguistics, semiotics and poetics. In memory of A.N. Zhurinsky* (Moscow, Rus. Ed. center, 1994)
10. V.V. Ivanov, *Lower mythology. Myths of the peoples of the world*. Vol. 2 (Moscow, Great Soviet Encyclopedia, 1988)
11. *Kalmyk-Russian Dictionary* (Moscow, Rus. Lang., 1977)
12. L.N. Vinogradova, *Slavic folk demonology: problems of comparative study* (Moscow, RIGU, 2001)
13. E.P. Bakaeva, *Pre-Buddhist beliefs of the Kalmyks (research and experience of reconstruction)* (Moscow, IEA RAS, 2006)
14. I.V. Kirilova, *Semantic field of “unclean power”: linguoculturological aspect* (Yekaterinburg, USPU, 2011)
15. G.Ts. Pyurbuev, *Explanatory dictionary of the traditional life of the Kalmyks* (Elista, Kalmyk Book Publ. House, 1996)
16. S.Z. Olzeeva, *Kalmyk folk traditions* (Elista, ZAO “NPP ‘Dzhangar’”, 2007)
17. A.B. Lidzhiev, *Prophetic dreams of the Kalmyks. Images and symbols* (Elista, AI RK “RIA “Kalmykia”, 2021)
18. A.A. Solovyova, The many-faced demon: the image of demonology figures in the folklore of China and Mongolia. Bull. of the KIHRS RAS **1**, 28–36 (2009)
19. G.V. Medvedeva, *Sorcerer, healer in Russian mythological stories, representations of Eastern Siberia (Structure and content of images. Areas and semantics of names)* (Ulan-Ude, Buryat State Univ., 1997)