

Tyumen Nenets Sacral Childhood Culture as an Ethnolinguistic Mechanism of Preserving Ethnic Identity

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Abstract: The article considers the specificity of the scenario for the linguistic modeling of personality in Nenets nomadic culture on the basis of childhood culture. Relying upon their own field data, the authors study the Nenets traditional lullaby as a way of creating the ethnic and linguistic consciousness of Nenets living in the north of Tyumen Region.

Key words: Nenets • Lullaby • Linguistic personality • Ethnic consciousness • Constants of Nenets culture • Anthroponyms

INTRODUCTION

Lullaby belongs to the intimate genre of folklore, which is a subject of both scientific and practical interest. This is the communication between mother and child that is hidden from the eyes of strangers. The authors collected lullabies in Tazovskiy and Purovskiy Districts of Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug of Tyumen Region. These lullabies became the material for the research.

The authors assume that lullaby is one of the methods for creating ethnolinguistic consciousness of a new member of one or another ethnic community. According to the true opinion of P. Bourdieu, social space is a logically conceivable construct and a kind of environment in which social relations are performed. Social space is not a physical space, but it seeks to be implemented in it more or less completely and precisely [1]. Thanks to the fact that “rhythm and structure of lullaby are conducive to inculcating information subliminally; stereotypes of national behaviour are learned without easily and freely” [2: 169]. At the same time a number of authors truly emphasize the importance of visualization phenomenon for adopting ethnicity forms [3].

In new situation of modernization and globalization of contemporary society, the specificity of preserving the ethnic self-awareness of small peoples of the North is of

special interest. The small peoples of the North experience the maximum cultural shock; and this fact characterizes the modern world as a whole in the era of globalization [4]. In the context of modern cross-cultural communications, man “is in search of new ways for preserving his ethno-cultural identity” [5: 78]. This process is the most urgent for border areas where migration is active. First of all, this is typical for the northern parts of Tyumen Region. One can see similar situations in tundra zones of other countries. American scientists made progress in reconstructing human attitude towards nature [6]. In such zones, “new modern Eurasian linguistic personality is emerging on the constructive basis of mental-linguistic polylogue” [7: 168]. On the other hand, we can speak about the development stages of an incomplete nation [8]. At the same time, many researchers soundly emphasize that traditional culture undergoes the ultimate load when it meets the culture of Western civilization [9]. All this characterizes the life of ethnicities with similar type of material and economic culture on different continents [10]. However, modern realities blur ethnic distinctions and make people try to find the new basis for preserving ethnolinguistic identity [11].

Child birth is always a joyful event in the life of Nenets nomadic family. Nevertheless, it is curiously enough that this process does not have any complex protective rites and ceremonies. In nomadic conditions,

they have to deliver a child at home, not in the tent family lives in. They build a separate tent especially for this event because the parturient is considered impure in this period. Nenets folk medicine advised woman to deliver kneeling simultaneously pulling herself up by special straps fastened to tent's poles. According to Nenets beliefs, difficult delivery is caused by the adultery of one of the spouses. This problem can be solved with the help of a special rite of repentance when spouses made knots on special small straps by the number of their adulteries.

After birth, the child is given the name. The naming process is of special interest. The trinomial anthroponymic structure of Tyumen Nenets arose by the end of the 18th century after people's Christianization. However, primordial national names remain up to now, first of all in everyday communication. As our informants report, there is no a single young man with only one name (only Russian or only Nenets) in Purovskiy District. Generally, Nenets primordial names indicated belonging to one or another clan: Uchelyuma, Uaivakhi Nipis "Nipis from Uaivakhi clan". Besides, there are names connected with addressing to a man by the degree of kinship in the contemporary dictionary of Nenets names. It should be noted that this kind of addressing is more popular than names among Nenets. For example, Nyapaku "daughter-in-law", Myauk "first cousin from mother's side", Pushay nemya "mother-in-law". In the contemporary dictionary of Nenets names, there are names with etymological roots in other languages, first of all from Chukchi and Eskimo: Ama/Oma "wolf" (Eskimo), Yl'va "wild reindeer" (Koryak). Nenets primordial names mostly have two bases:

Nenets Male Names:

- Apyvaku: apy "bear" + vaku "oldman"
- Makhakhelaku: makha "back" + khelaku "white"
- Uchavaku: ucha "small" + vaku "oldman"
- Ylina "viable"
- Khomadyay "good"
- Upuna "in cradle"

Nenets Female Names:

- Upyni: upy "cloudberry" + ni "girl"
- Ochini: ochi "berries" + ni "girl, housewife"
- Malyamni: malyam + ni "thick"
- Satani "hard-working"
- Upy "cloudberry"
- Khylyuni "mistress of ice floes"

In the majority of cases, the dictionary of Nenets names corresponds to traditional gender roles: female names symbolize beauty, kindness, femininity in general (Shatuta "beautiful") and male names are masculinity-oriented; they glorify strength, endurance, etc.

As a rule, mother was responsible for upbringing children. When a child is born the mother composed a personal song for him. This song was considered man's personal myth. That is why it is sacral. For instance:

Pukyamb komi	My leggy
Nyumi sava nyumi	My good boy
Tonya khonengyo	Let him sleep
Pyda vadabada	Because he is growing
Nyuva ngarambata,	Our sonny is growing,
Iri pydavanda.	And like his granddad
Vanda, Yanakova,	Yanako will be,
Manya sava nyuva.	Our pretty son.

In our opinion, the sacredness of Nenets lullabies called tetel'-vetel' correlate with Kazakh farewell songs-lamentations called zhoktau because both open a way to one of the worlds for the "novice". An infant does not entirely belong to this world. That is why lullaby as though "attaches" him to the world of people and gives him the opportunity to join human society. Just because of this, lullaby describes the desirable qualities for the child to reveal. At the same time, Kazakh farewell lamentations help the departed to pass from the world of people to the world of spirits by describing his life. People sing a song which glorifies the deeds of the departed so that he becomes a tutelary spirit (aruakh). Besides, this farewell song as though "lulls" the departed preparing him for the "eternal sleep" [2: 101].

It is folklore that allows us to penetrate deeper than other sources into the spiritual world of the nation, in the world of its images and ideas. In this context, such things as disclosing the inward meaning and deep semantics of words connected with one or another rite, belief or subject are of great importance [12: 118-122]. Thereupon, language is traditionally considered a part of the culture, a cultural phenomenon and a means of expressing culture. One or another nation makes its own emphases while domesticating the world. In our opinion, the renaissance of traditional cultures, that recently roused the world, is connected with ecological awareness and humanism established in traditional culture [13].

Nenets lullabies are rich in wishes: nyuva, manya nyuva, syadotakoyeva "our sonny with beautiful face", yebtcotakayeva "our agile baby", pedavakoyeva "quick,

frisky, nimble”, meretakoyeva “agile”, or Savva ilebt tayov-ov, Vynday syonzyar tyuyov-ov “Be happy and love our tundra”.

An image of nabatsi is found in Nenets lullabies. This is an analogue of Russian “buka” – a creature by which Nenets frighten children persuading them to go to sleep (“Sleep, or else Nabatsi will come!”).

The religion and folklore of Tyumen Nenets are inextricably intertwined. Their mythology is a system of primitive world-view that includes the sources of prescientific notions about the world and man, different forms of art, philosophy and religion.

Picture of the world is an intermediary between different spheres of human culture and a means for their integration. People speaking different languages have different methods of accentuation, conceptualization, categorization, classification, structuralization and describing spatial objects, their features and relations [14: 34]. So, the linguistic picture of human world reflected in lullabies of Tyumen Region makes it possible to study the linguistic peculiarities of a certain sex-age group and a certain individual not from “abstract” point of view but “from within”. In some lullabies a Nenets baby is satakov khasavov “agile”, in others he is isyakabtadava “a mischievous child”, in third he is mebetov khasavov “a sturdy man” or yervakov, tetakov “reindeer breeder”. Thereby nomad’s consciousness is formed in the conditions of severe tundra.

Besides, lullabies – regardless of ethnicity – have such phonosemantic characteristics as bright, tender and swift with dominating blue colour. Specific relations between information flows and types of information arise in lullaby. Suggestive information has its indications of content and formality. They include specific semantic filling of lullaby in dependence of child’s gender and a repeating refrain. In Nenets traditional lullabies there is a certain scenario consciousness when a lullaby creates a specifically tinged ethnic stereotype of preferable social behavior.

There is no doubt that on the one hand ethnic self-awareness reflects entitative peculiarities of culture. On the other hand, it is able to exert an active influence on the evolution of ethnic community intensifying the interest in national culture and history and promoting the formation of specific national interests. The stereotypes of apprehending one’s own and other ethnicities are one of important elements of ethnic self-awareness. That is why Nenets lullabies say: “Nisyand hevkhy nedov-ov Syonzyand myunya meyov-ov Khibiriyay nyuyuv-ov Seyar ngerungayov-ov” (“Do not forget ancient ways of

your father. Meet everyone with open heart”). When a guest comes to Nenets, they compose a song in honour of him. In this song, they enumerate all his generations and his place in this system. The involvement of the past into the present allows people to comprehend events in a special way. It is difficult to study Nenets folklore because this genre is intricate in general.

As long as “language itself is first of all a categorization and reconstruction of objects and relations between them” [15: 122-123], the sacral-ritual discourse of tundra Nenets traditional childhood culture has been traced to the earliest pagan notions based on animistic and even totemic perception of natural world. Besides, there are certain behavioral signs – ritual sacral events – which take a significant place in the sacral discourse of traditional childhood culture. These are ceremonial acts, for example – rolling an egg over child’s body for breaking the hex, fumigating child with reindeer’s wool set on fire, winding copper wire around body, whispering near a burning candle to an open door, walking through scissors or knife for intensifying sex appeal, etc. In this case, ritual meaning is realized as predictability, program, traditionalism and the predominance of fate over information in sacral ceremony. This is aimed at actualizing satisfaction and joy because of the achieved goal. In connection with the foregoing, the linguistic practice of Nenets traditional sacral-ritual childhood culture is an amazing phenomenon because it touches the deep layers of person’s psychic. Besides, it is a form of folk psychotherapy in which all aspects of verbal and nonverbal communication are person-oriented and significant.

Within the framework of archaic folklore, it is difficult to demarcate, for instance, myth and tale, or tale and epic poem, which can be found in personalized Nenets traditional song. These forms create a mythologized heroic image of a new member of Nenets community. Moreover, the situation is complicated by the fact that a number of Nenets myths and legends were told in the form of a song and some cultic songs have a plot and thereby they are closely connected with narrative folk genres.

It is obvious that in nomadic (tundra) conditions Nenets perfected the things they could take away – the art of oral words. They even created oral books. This method of learning important information brings them closer to other nomadic nations (Kazakh, Mongol, Khanty, etc.). The whole ritual folklore contributes to a certain ethnic awareness of an individual because they view reality in terms of religious beliefs. Nenets addresses

to “masters” (spirits) each of which rule over his corner of surrounding world domesticated by people. Here we meet a kind of “mix” of paganism and the religious views of an ordinary native speaker of contemporary language. Therefore, such personages as kriks, nebatsi, schekotukha, witches, witch doctors and others are found side by side with the images of the Virgin, Jesus Christ and various angels. At the same time, the texts of Nenets traditional childhood culture emphasize man’s godhead reconstructing his personal ego like gestalt therapy does. The verbal aspect of the sacral-ritual practice of childhood culture is inseparably linked with global processes of relations and mutual influence in the triad “particular verbal act (spell, charm, lullaby) – speech – language”. Pagan myth formerly performed a sacral role in close connection with rites. In contemporary sociocultural situation, it was transformed into folklore text. In pagan culture, myth text was esoteric, that is it was a carrier of secret knowledge for initiates. It should be noted that lullabies have sacral features in traditional childhood culture until now, because every lullaby is a personalized myth composed by mother and grand-mother after the childbirth. They sing this lullaby to only one child embedding it in the complex system of clan relations. The lullaby can be passed to some other person is possible only when the man it was composed for is dead. It is believed that if a strange man pronounces the lullaby it can cause harm. These facts indicate the combination of different processes in the traditional culture of the Nenets in Tyumen, in onomasphere, in transformation in the discover new parallels in the sacred space of Turkic and Finno-Samoyedic peoples [16].

So, the thousand-year experience of human formation and development reflected in lullabies includes a special part – the experience of the formation and development of an individual as a tribal being. This being contains – in a folded form – a memory of the stages of human development determined by his ethnicity.

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