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Colloquial Elements in Oirat Script Documents of the 19th Century¹

Abstract

Monuments written in the Oirat Clear script are valuable sources for a research on the history of the Oirat dialects. Although Written Oirat is rather an archaic language in its original form, the precise sound marking capability of Zaya Pandita's Clear script makes easier for elements of the contemporary spoken language to infiltrate into the written language. Examples taken from four Written Oirat sources of the 19th century demonstrate the diversity of colloquial elements. Thorough study of the colloquial influence helps to layout the relative and absolute chronology of changes that took place in Oirat during the centuries.

Keywords: Written Oirat, Spoken Oirat, Oirat script, Clear script, colloquial influence, history of language, Oirat Zaya Pandita

The literary language known as Written Oirat is the traditional written language of the Western Mongols or Oirats, including Kalmyks in South Russia, and Oirats in Xinjiang and Western Mongolia. It is written in the so-called Clear script or Oirat script which has been created in 1648 by the famous Oirat Buddhist monk Zaya Pandita (he is known also by his Tibetan title Nam mkha'i rgya mtsho, its Oirat variant Namkhajamtso and its translation Oqtoruyin Dalai 'Heavenly Ocean'). Zaya Pandita's script and the literature written in this script were studied by a number of scholars. From among the works of the 19th century the first grammars of A. Popov² and A. Bobrovnikov³ should be mentioned

¹ The present study is a part of a research project supported by the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund (OTKA 100613). Hereby I would like to express my thanks to the two anonymous reviewers of my article for their valuable remarks and suggestions.

² А. Попов, *Грамматика калмыцкого языка*, Казань 1847.

³ А. Бобровников, *Грамматика монгольско-калмыцкого языка*, Казань 1849.

here, as well as H.A. Zwick's grammar and dictionary,⁴ Cornelius Rahmn's grammar and dictionary (published only recently by Jan-Olof Svantesson),⁵ and A. Pozdneev's chrestomaties and other works.⁶ The most important studies and works of later times include the books of G.D. Sanžeev,⁷ Kh. Luvsanbaldan,⁸ György Kara,⁹ N.S. Yakhontova,¹⁰ as well as the dictionary of J.R. Krueger¹¹ and works of many others, not listed here.

The script itself is based on the well-known Uighur-Mongolian script and is intended to eliminate its deficiencies and to create a consistent script which can clearly reflect the sounds of the contemporary Mongolian language and is suitable for all the Mongols. Oirat script has separate letters for marking short and long vowel phonemes, voiced and voiceless consonants, and reduces the number of positional allographs. The language that was used by Zaya Pandita for writing texts in the new script (mostly translations of Buddhist sutras) was mainly based on Written Mongolian and reflected its contemporary clerical pronunciation. This written language was archaic and also artificial in some respects, consequently, it was rather far from the contemporary spoken language. Thanks to the advantages of the script and despite of the artificial character of the new written language, Zaya Pandita's script quickly became popular and widespread among Oirats, but mainly due to political reasons it was never accepted by Eastern Mongols, and it became known as Oirat script. Although the Oirat written language retained its original bookish style in many respects up to the 20th century, it incorporated more and more colloquial elements during the time. Since Zaya Pandita's alphabet could reflect the sound set of contemporary Mongolian and Oirat dialects very well, it was easy for colloquial elements to infiltrate the written language. This process was also facilitated by the fact that Written Oirat did not have such a standardised form as Written Mongolian, and the fall of the Dzungarian Empire in the middle of the 18th century eliminated the possible standardising influence of the Dzungarian chancellery, too. Written Oirat was shaped by a number of individuals and local centres of literacy (e.g. monasteries).

⁴ H.A. Zwick, *Grammatik der West-Mongolischen das ist Oirad oder Kalmückischen Sprache*, 1851; H.A. Zwick, *Handbuch der Westmongolischen Sprache*, 1853.

⁵ J.-O., Svantesson, *Cornelius Rahmn's Kalmuck Grammar*, in: *Turkic Languages* 13 (2009), pp. 97–140; J.-O. Svantesson (ed., transl.), *Cornelius Rahmn's Kalmuck Dictionary*, *Turcologica* 93, Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden 2012.

⁶ А. Позднеев, *Калмыцкая хрестоматия для чтения в старших классах калмыцких народных школ*, Санкт-Петербург 1892, 1907, 1915.

⁷ Г.Д. Санжеев, *Сравнительная грамматика монгольских языков I*, Москва 1953; Г.Д. Санжеев, *Лингвистическое введение в изучение истории письменности монгольских народов*. Улан-Уде 1977.

⁸ Х. Лувсанбалдан, *Тод үсэг, түүний дурсгалууд*, БНМАУ Шинжлэх Ухааны Академи, Хэл Зохиолын Хүрээлэн, Улаанбаатар 1975.

⁹ Д. Кара, *Книги монгольских кочевников (семь веков монгольской письменности)*, Москва 1972; György Kara, *Books of the Mongolian Nomads. More than Eight Centuries of Writing Mongolian*, Indiana University Uralic and Altaic Series 171, Indiana University, Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, Bloomington 2005.

¹⁰ Н.С. Яхонтова, *Ойратский литературный язык XVII века*, Москва 1996.

¹¹ J.R. Krueger, *Materials for an Oirat-Mongolian to English Citation Dictionary I–III*, Bloomington 1978, 1984, 1984.

In the first half of the 20th century significant changes took place in the Oirat literary tradition due to several reasons. Kalmyks in Russia officially abandoned their traditional writing system in favour of Latin and Cyrillic scripts, and also the Oirats of Xinjiang introduced significant changes in their orthography, making the written language closer to the spoken tongue. So the 20th century marks a new milestone in the history of Oirat script and the preceding 19th century together with the very beginning of the 20th century is the period when the largest amount of colloquial elements could be observed and studied in Oirat texts belonging to the original Written Oirat tradition.

Beyond the changes in the native literary tradition of Oirats, the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries is the time when new corpora of the Oirat language became available in phonetic transcription suitable for thorough linguistic analysis. The first such corpus of the Oirat vernacular was collected among the Kalmyks in 1871 by Gábor Bálint of Szentkatolna, who used a quite precise, but still not perfect transcription. Unfortunately, these texts and his grammar of the East and West Mongolian languages were published only recently by Ágnes Birtalan,¹² although minor excerpts from Bálint's material were published earlier.¹³ Later on the works of V.L. Kotvič,¹⁴ B.Ya. Vladimirtsov,¹⁵ G.J. Ramstedt¹⁶ and other noted scholars opened a new era in Oirat studies. Texts written in Oirat script mostly became obsolete for researches on the modern Oirat dialects, but they are still among the most valuable sources for diachronic studies.

Appearance of colloquial elements in Written Oirat texts is far from being regular and consistent. It highly depends on the genre and content of written monuments as well as the practice and individual preferences of their authors. As a rule, monuments with a formal or religious content are written in more traditional style and show less colloquial influence. Documents concerning everyday activities or informal topics are influenced stronger by the colloquial speech. Therefore personal and business letters are those sources which have the strongest influence of the spoken language, whereas narrative texts, legal documents, codes and formal letters have less, but still significant traces. The most traditional monuments are canonical religious texts, especially Buddhist sutras translated from Tibetan. Folk-religious texts, however, may be strongly influenced by the colloquial language.

¹² Á. Birtalan, *Kalmyk Folklore and Folk Culture in the Mid-19th Century. Philological Studies on the Basis of Gábor Bálint of Szentkatolna's Kalmyk Texts*, Oriental Studies 15, Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences; Budapest, Kalmyk Institute of Humanitarian Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Elista 2011; Á. Birtalan (ed.), *Gábor Bálint of Szentkatolna, A Romanized Grammar of the East- and West-Mongolian Languages. With Popular Chrestomathies of Both Dialects*, Budapest Oriental Reprints B3, Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Csoma de Kőrös Society, Budapest 2009.

¹³ E.g. L.J. Nagy, *Bálint's Journey to the Mongols and his Unedited Kalmuck Texts*, in: *AOH IX* (1959), pp. 311–327.

¹⁴ Вл.Л. Котвич, *Опыт грамматики калмыцкого разговорного языка*, Издание вт. Калмыцкая Комиссия Культурных Работников в Чехословацкой Республике Ржевнице у Праги, Прага 1929.

¹⁵ Б.Я. Владимирцов, *Образцы монгольской народной словесности*, Ленинград 1926.

¹⁶ G.J. Ramstedt, *Kalmückisches Wörterbuch*, Suomalais-Ugrilainen Seura, Helsinki 1935.

The living spoken language can appear in any segment of the written language, and its influence on the phonetics, morphology, syntax and lexicon of written texts could be observed frequently. Various texts contain different kinds of colloquial elements: some texts show only phonetic or morphologic features, while others are characterized by all types of colloquial elements. Usually, colloquial elements exist in parallel with more archaic traditional elements of the written language even in the same texts.

Separating the traces of colloquial influence from pure spelling and copying errors is a very important, but sometimes difficult task. Furthermore, not only errors and mistakes but also certain simplifications in the spelling of words can be confusing to some extent. Such an orthographic simplification is the omission of diacritical marks of certain letters when the writer thinks that the reading of a word is clear enough even without the diacritical marks. In these cases mostly the rule of vowel harmony ensures the correct reading: if the vocalism of a word is clearly determined by the vowel of the first syllable or the presence of harmonising consonant pairs (*x-k*, *γ-g*) gives a hint, then diacritical marks of further vowel letters are frequently omitted. Omitting a diacritical mark has been encoded into the system of Clear script from its very beginnings, since long /u:/ is originally indicated by a digraph *ou* and later by *uu*, where the diacritical mark of the latter vowel letter is always omitted, so it is written in the same way as *ü*.

Colloquial elements of Written Oirat are valuable sources for studying the history of Oirat dialects, and provide data for creating the relative and absolute chronology of changes which took place during the centuries. History of Oirat is a relatively unstudied field, there are no comprehensive works dealing with this topic except the studies on limited text corpora. The present study is a part of an extensive research project that aims to collect both native and external sources on the Oirat language, and analyse them from diachronic and comparative aspects.

Sources

Despite of the fact that Oirat literacy produced a large amount of various texts during the 19th century, the present study focuses on certain documents only and cites examples from the following four sources:

1. Collection of letters of the famous Mongolist Isaak Jakob Schmidt (hereinafter referred to as IJS). These letters were written by Kalmyk noblemen and commoners during the time when at the beginning of the 19th century Schmidt was working as a shopkeeper in the mission of the Moravian Church in Sarepta near Tsaritsyn (today's Volgograd, incorporating also the territory of Sarepta). The letters addressed to Schmidt (or Šimed as he is usually mentioned by Kalmyks) are mainly on topics connected to his trading business with Kalmyks. The letters are kept in the archive of the Moravian Brethren in their centre in Herrnhut and were published by John R. Krueger.¹⁷

¹⁷ J.R. Krueger and R.G. Service (eds.), *Kalmyk Old-script Documents of Isaac Jacob Schmidt 1800–1810*, Asiatische Forschungen Band 143, Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden 2002.

2. A Kalmyk historical survey entitled *Xošuud noyon Bātur Ubaši Tümeni tuurbiqсан дөрбөн ойирадийн түүке* (hereinafter referred to as DÖT). This work was written at the beginning of the 19th century (probably in 1819) by an educated Kalmyk nobleman, Bātur Ubaši on the basis of his father Tümen's earlier writings. It was published several times, first in a Russian translation by G.S. Lytkin and later in Oirat script by A. Pozdneev in 1885,¹⁸ by Luvsandbaldan in 1976,¹⁹ and also by others.

3. *Altan erike* (hereinafter referred to as AE), which is a historical work written by Darmābadrā at the beginning of the 20th century, probably in 1911. It contains a brief outline of Mongolia's and Tibet's history, and also valuable information concerning the history of the Jakhchins. Although formally this is not a 19th-century work, it belongs to the same period of literary tradition. It was first published in 1997 by G. Kara and J. Tsooloo in facsimile,²⁰ and later by B. Tүвшинтөгс and Na. Сүхбаатар in 2006.²¹

4. An account of the Kalmyk Bāza baqši on his journey to Tibet, written in 1893 (hereinafter referred to as BB). Although the original manuscript of this source has not been discovered yet, and it is known only from the printed edition of A. Pozdneev from 1894,²² there is no real reason to exclude it from the corpus of the source materials on Written Oirat. Apart from the commentaries of A. Pozdneev, the language of this source was extensively studied by E.V. Bembeev.²³

As regards the afore-mentioned and cited sources, they contain different amount of colloquial elements. Most colloquial elements could be found in the letters of Isaak Jakob Schmidt, whereas the most traditional text is probably the *Altan erike*. Other sources are somewhere in the middle between these two. Although the author of *Altan erike* wrote his work mostly in a quite traditional and archaic form of Written Oirat, his text is also not free from spoken idioms and there are words consistently occurring in their colloquial form.

In order to demonstrate the difference between traditional forms and colloquial elements, each example provided here contains parallel data from Written Mongolian, traditional Written Oirat and modern Kalmyk. Of course, traditional Written Oirat does not have an exact definition and standardised forms, therefore the same word or morpheme can occur in several variants in the sources. The present author does not intend to give full list of these variants, only one–two parallel data will be provided here. Similarly, the colloquial elements mentioned here can not claim to be complete, the present study provides only a brief insight to the discussed topic.

¹⁸ А. М. Позднеев, *Памятники исторической литературы астраханских калмыков*, Санкт-Петербург 1885, pp. 1–48.

¹⁹ Х. Лувсанбалдан (ed.), *Тод үсгийн дурсгалууд*, Улаанбаатар 1976, pp. 378–432.

²⁰ G. Kara and J. Tsooloo (eds.), *The History of a Jakhachin Buddhist Monastery – Dharmabadra's "Golden Rosary"*, Debter/Deb-ther/Debtelin 12, MTA Altajisztikai Kutatócsoport, Budapest 1997.

²¹ Б. Түвшинтөгс and На. Сүхбаатар (eds.), *Баатар уви туурвисан Дөрвөн ойрадын түүх оршив*, Bibliotheca Oiratica II, Тод номын гэрэл төв, Улаанбаатар 2006.

²² А. Позднеев (ed.), *Сказание о хождении в Тибетскую страну Мало-дөрбётского База-бакиши*, Факультет восточных языков императорского С.-Петербургского университета, Санктпетербургъ 1897.

²³ Е.В. Бембеев, *Лингвистическое описание памятника старокалмыцкой (ойратской) письменности: «Сказание о хождении в Тибетскую страну Малодербетовского База-бакиши»*, Москва 2004 (PhD dissertation),

Phonetic changes

Both the original quantity and quality of vowels of non-first syllables have changed in Oirat. Short vowels could drop out or be significantly reduced, while their distinction also has been neutralised. In the result of this neutralisation all those short vowels that did not disappear correspond to a neutral schwa (/ə/) in modern Oirat dialects. These changes are often reflected in the 19th-century Written Oirat texts. Drop out of vowels is easily noticeable if the given vowel is simply missing in the written text (1).

- (1) a. IJS 15:13 *xulγuna* ‘mouse’, WM *quluyān-a*, WO *xuluyāna*, Kalm. *хулһн*;
 b. IJS *xan-ba-bi* ‘satisfy-PRAET.PERF-1SG’, WM *xanuba bi*, WO *xanabai bi*, Kalm. *хануѳ*²⁴.

Since schwa has no direct equivalent in Oirat script, scribes could 1) rely on the literary tradition and write words according to the traditional orthography, 2) indicate schwa with a vowel letter that seemed to be the most appropriate substitute (it is visible if the substitute letter differs from that of the traditional orthography), or 3) leave it out at all. The frequent and regular appearance of the former two in Written Oirat texts is a clear evidence of the presence of schwa in the contemporary Oirat dialects. Apparently, vowel substitution (method 2) did not have unified and consistent rules, so many alternating variants can be observed. A frequent way of choosing the substitution letter is simply repeating the vowel of the preceding syllable. Examples 2a–d demonstrate vowel repetition, 2e shows the drop out of the vowel, while 2f–g are examples of a simple vowel substitution.

- (2) a. DÖT 30r10 *oyirid* ‘Oirat’, WM *oyirad*, WO *oyirod*, Kalm. *өөрѳ*;
 b. AE 15v02 *kitid* ‘China, Chinese’, WM *kitad*, WO *kitad*, Kalm. *кумѳ*;
 c. AE 9v10 *kürtüle*, IJS 143:10 *kürtülü* ‘to, until’, WM *kürtele*, WO *kürtele*, Kalm. *күртл*;
 d. BB 87:1 *γurbu* ‘three’, WM *γurba(n)*, WO *γurba(n)*, Kalm. *һүрѳ(н)*;
 e. AE 3r07 *urid-yin* ‘before-GEN’, WM *urida-yin*, WO *urida-yin*, Kalm. *урѳин*;
 f. IJS 21:2 *ilge-qsiin* ‘send-NOM.PERF’, WM *ilegegsen*, WO *ilgēqsēn*, Kalm. *илгэсн*;
 g. IJS 21:5 *γar-γa-qson* ‘go.out-CAUS-NOM.PERF’, WM *γarγaγsan*, WO *γarγaqsan*, Kalm. *һарһасн*.

Not only short vowels but also long vowels of non-first syllables became shorter (appr. equal with the length of short vowels of the initial syllables), however, they retained

²⁴ Morpheme boundaries are indicated in the primary examples only, not in the WM, WO and Kalm. parallels. Underlined texts show the demonstrated phenomena.

their quality during this process. The shortening of original long vowels is reflected in modern Kalmyk Cyrillic orthography but relatively rarely occurs in Written Oirat texts in consistent way and its occurrence is hard to distinguish from errors. As Pozdneevev already has noticed,²⁵ the account of Bāza Baqši contains some examples of this phenomenon, which concerns not only original long vowels, but also long vowels developed from diphthongs (3).

- (3) BB 77:2 *düngge* ‘size (of)’, WO *dünggē*, Kalm. *дүңгэ*.

Fronting effect of vowel /i/ of non-initial (rarely first) syllables is a well-known and documented characteristic feature of today’s Oirat dialects. In the result of the process the original back vowels of the first syllables turn into front ones (/a/ → /ä/, /o/ → /ö/, /u/ → /ü/), or sometimes the consonant preceding /i/ is palatalised instead of the fronting of the vowel in the first syllable. The change of the vowel in the first syllable also changes the vocalism of the whole word, and – according to vowel harmony – the front vowel variant of suffixes are used during suffixation. Fronted vowels leave traces in Written Oirat texts in two ways: a) the spelling directly reflects the new vowel quality (4), b) the harmonising vowel of suffixes indirectly reflects the change, while the word stem (or at least its initial syllable) still contains a back vowel in its written form (5). The first method is possible only in the case of /o/ → /ö/ and /u/ → /ü/, but it is impossible with /a/ → /ä/, since /ä/ is a phoneme in spoken Oirat that has no letter in the Oirat script (probably because it was not present as a phoneme in the language when the script was invented by Zaya Pandita). Therefore /ä/ and its long pair /ä:/ are either not marked (so the spelling contains the original *a* or *ayi* letters) or substituted with another letter, e.g. the closest equivalents *e* and *ē*, or sometimes *ayi*.

- (4) a. AE 33r09 *mörlö-böi* ‘go/travel-PRAET.PERF’, WM *morilabai*, WO *morilabai*, *moriloboi*, Kalm. *мөрлө*;
 b. AE 12r06 *töyün* ‘monk’, WM *toyin*, WO *toyin*, Kalm. *төөн*;
 c. DÖT 29v11 *zöri-n* ‘move.in.the.direction.of-ADV.MOD’, WM *jorin*, WO *zorin*, Kalm. *зөрн*;
 d. AE 14v04 *nörsö-qsön* ‘rest/ sleep-NOM.PERF’, WM *noyirsaysan*, WO *noyirsoqson*, Kalm. *нөөрсөн*;
 e. BB 87:8 *dekēd* ‘again’, WM *dakiyad*, WO *dakīd*, Kalm. *дэкэд*;
 f. AE 31v14 *öyiröd* ‘Oirat’, WM *oyirad*, WO *oyirod*, Kalm. *өөрд*;
 g. DÖT 29v13 *zöriüülü-qsen* ‘devote.to-NOM.PERF’, WM *joriyuluysan*, WO *zoriuluqsan*, Kalm. *зөрүлсн*.

²⁵ Позднѣевъ, *Сказание о хождении Бāза-бакии*, р. XVI.

- (5) a. IJS *bar-ǰd* ‘hold/take-ADV.PERF’, WM *bariyad*, WO *barīd*, Kalm. *бэрэд*;
 b. IJS *bayi-nei* ‘be-PRAES.IMP’, WM *bayinai*, *bayin-a* (*bayimui*), WO *bayinai*, Kalm. *бээнэ*;
 c. DÖT 22v09 *bari-nē* ‘hold/take-PRAES.IMP’, WM *barinai*, *barin-a* (*barimui*), WO *barinai*, Kalm. *бэрнэ*;
 d. DÖT 4r08 *bayi-qsen* ‘be-NOM.PERF’, WM *bayiqsan*, WO *bayiqsan*, Kalm. *бээсн*;
 e. IJS 153:11 *arbiġi-bei* ‘grow/increase.in.number-PRAET.PERF’, WM *arbiġibai*, WO *arbiġibai*, Kalm. *эрвжэ*;
 f. AE 19v04 *bari-ul-ǰd* ‘hold/ take-CAUS-ADV.PERF’, WM *bariyulayad*, WO *bariulād*, Kalm. *бэргүлэд*.

Another typical change that took place in the Oirat dialects during the last centuries is the change of original diphthongs to long monophthongs. Although traditional Written Oirat retains the original diphthongs, long vowels appear instead of them several times in many texts due to the influence of the spoken language (6).

- (6) a. DÖT 31v19 *zaluu-s-tā-γān* ‘young.man-PL-SOC-REFL.POSS’, WM *ġalayus-tai-ban*, WO *zaluustai-bēn*, *zaluustaiγān*, Kalm. *залустанан*;
 b. AE 30v02 *xōšī* ‘after’, WM *qoyiysi*, WO *xoyišī*, Kalm. *хооран*;
 c. IJS 45:4 *xār-ār* ‘grace-INSTR’, WM *qayira-bar*, WO *xayira-bēr*, Kalm. *хээрэр*;
 d. IJS 161:6 *üüile-ten* ‘deed-POSS.2’, WM *üyile tanu*, WO *üyile tani*, Kalm. *үүлтн*.

The neutralisation of diphthongs and long vowels in the spoken language has a less common side effect in writing: diphthongs and long monophthongs alternate not only in the spelling of words and suffixes which originally contained the former, but also in places where diphthongs were never present (7).

- (7) a. AE 17v04 *širei* ‘throne’, WM *sirege*, WO *širē*, Kalm. *шурэ*;
 b. DÖT 32r17 *köbüi* ‘son’, WM *köbegü(n)*, WO *köböü(n)*, *köbüü(n)*, Kalm. *хөвү(н)*;
 c. DÖT 31r22 *zaluu-s-tā-γayin* ‘young.man-PL-SOC-REFL.POSS’, WM *ġalayus-tai-ban*, WO *zaluustai-bēn*, *zaluustaiγān*, Kalm. *залустанан*.

Rounding harmony is a phonotactic restriction in some of the Mongolic languages which controls the occurrence of non-close rounded and unrounded vowels in words (close vowels are not concerned). It is a progressive harmony, so the roundedness of a non-close vowel in a syllable determines the roundedness of non-close vowels occurring in the following syllables, including word stems and suffixes, too. Most of modern Oirat dialects are characterised by the lack of rounding harmony, so suffixes with full

(not reduced) non-high vowels have only two allomorphes according to labial harmony: the vowel is /a/ in back vocalic allomorphs and /æ/ in front ones. However, there are dialects (some variants spoken in Qinghai, Alasha and Western Mongolia) in which rounding harmony can be observed in word stems and also in some suffixes. On the contrary, one of the most conspicuous features of traditional Written Oirat is consistent rounding harmony controlling both word stems and suffixes. It is not clear that rounding harmony of Zaya Pandita's variant of Written Oirat is a mere orthographic feature or a reflection of a certain dialect of his time. Similarly, the origin of rounding harmony observable in some modern Oirat dialects should be studied, too: it can be an inherited feature or the influence of the neighbouring Mongolian dialects (Khalkha, etc.). Historical sources written by Europeans in Latin or Cyrillic script on the 17th and 18th-century Oirat suggest that rounding harmony was present in that time, and it disappeared only in the 19th century, as it is proven by later sources. Consequently, appearance of non-harmonising forms in Written Oirat texts is most likely the reflection of the changes which took place in the spoken tongue. Another possible, but less likely explanation is the influence of Written Mongolian, which is also characterized by lack of rounding harmony.

- (8) a. AE 17r08 *tō-tai* 'number-SOC', WM *toγatai*, WO *tōtoi*, Kalm. *mooma*;
 b. AE 13r11 *γomd-ād* 'complain-ADV.PERF', WM *γomdayad*, WO *γomdōd*, Kalm. *homdaḍ*;
 c. ISJ 21:9 *öq-ne-bi* 'give-PRAES.IMP-1SG', WM *öggün-e bi*, WO **öqnöi bi*, Kalm. *өгнэв*.

When non-harmonising unrounded vowels are present only in the place of original short vowels of a word, then it is rather an example of vowel reduction and neutralisation than the reflection of the lack of rounding harmony (9).

- (9) a. IJS 137:6 *γomda-ba* 'complain-PRAET.PERF', WM *γomdaba*, WO *γomdobo(i)*, Kalm. *homḍv*;
 b. AE 22r12 *odo-qsan* 'go-NOM.PERF', WM *oduγsan*, WO *odoqson*, Kalm. *одсн*.

Vowel of the initial syllable can be assimilated under the influence of neighbouring labial consonants in Oirat. The most frequent example that is also well-attested in Written Oirat sources is modern /jow-/ 'to go', which is spelled as *yabu-* in traditional Written Oirat and *yob-* or *yobu-* in some texts with colloquial influence (10).

- (10) a. IJS 131:3 *yōbo-ji* 'go-ADV.IMP', WM *yabuju*, WO *yabuji*, Kalm. *йовж*;
 b. IJS 165:6 *yōbu-xa-š* 'go-NOM.FUT-NEG', WM *yabuqu bisi*, WO *yabuxu biši*, Kalm. *йовху*.

Suffix variants

As it was mentioned, Zaya Pandita's variant of Written Oirat is characterised by archaic and sometimes artificial elements. This is well observable in the morphology, there are several suffixes that slightly differ from the corresponding morphemes of the spoken language.

The equivalent of Written Mongolian ablative case marker *-ača/eče* in Zaya Pandita's original written language is a non-harmonising suffix (or postposition) *-ēce*. This artificial form takes its origin from the bookish reading of the Written Mongolian suffix, which is written separately and have a single surface form ᠠᠴᠢ . If it is treated as an independent word or postposition, it could be read as *eče*, according to the rules of Written Mongolian, and this reading is the base of *-ēce* morpheme of Written Oirat. The same non-harmonising reading of Written Mongolian morphemes could be observed at other suffixes in Written Oirat, such as the marker of the instrumental case and the reflexive possessive.

Ablative case marker of the spoken Oirat language is different from the archaic *-ēce* form. Today's Oirat dialects have two allomorphs: */-a:s/* and */-æ:s/*, according to palatal harmony. Similar variants are well-documented in Written Oirat texts, even in sources from the 17th century (e.g. Galdan Khan's letter to the Russian Tsar from 1691²⁶). The allomorphs of the colloquial variants which occur in Written Oirat texts are the following ones: *-āsu/āsa/ās*, *-ēsü/ēse/ēs*, *-ōsu/ōs*, *-ōsü/ōs*. Allomorphs with rounded vowels can be either direct reflections of the spoken forms (it is true for earlier texts, since rounding harmony was probably present in Oirat of the 17–18th centuries), or influenced by the rule of rounding harmony of Written Oirat (in later texts, when rounding harmony did not exist in spoken Oirat).

- (11) a. DÖT 14v18 *ax-āsq-ni* 'brother-ABL-POSS.3', WM *aq-a-ača inu*, WO *axa-ēce inu*, Kalm. *ахачн*;
 b. DÖT 2v19 *čay-āsu* 'time-ABL', WM *čay-ača*, WO *čaq-ēce*, Kalm. *цагач*;
 c. IJS 15:5 *tayiš-āsu* 'prince-ABL', WM *tayisi-ača*, WO *tayiši-ēce*, Kalm. *тэйшэс*;
 d. DÖT 29v20 *dor-ōsu* 'below/down-ABL', WM *doora-ača*, WO *dōro-ēce*, Kalm. *дорач*;
 e. BB 86:10 *müren-ēse* 'river-ABL', WM *müren-eče*, WO *müren-ēce*, Kalm. *мөрнэс*.

Original marker of instrumental case is also an archaising suffix: *-yēr* (after consonants, WM *-iyar/iyer*) and *-bēr* (after vowels, WM *-bar/ber*). The explanation for the non-harmonising character of these suffixes is very similar to that of the ablative case marker:

²⁶ Н.П. Шастина, *Русско-монгольские посольские отношения XVII века*, Издательство восточной литературы, Москва 1958; J.R. Krueger, *Three Oirat Mongolian Diplomatic Documents of 1691*, in: *Central Asiatic Journal* Vol. 12, No. 4, 1957, pp. 286–195; Д. Кара, *Поправки к чтению ойратских писем Галдана*, in: *Исследования в восточной филологии*, Наука, Москва 1974, pp. 55–59.

the bookish reading of Written Mongolian suffixes. Colloquial forms in Written Oirat texts corresponding to today's /-ar/ and /-ær/ suffixes are *-ār*, *-ēr*, *-ōr*, *-ō̄r* and *-īr* (after stem final *i*). What concerns rounding harmony the situation is the very same as in the case of ablative. The use of colloquial forms of the instrumental case marker is so widespread in certain texts (such as Bāza Baq̄ši's account), that the archaic *-bēr* and *-yēr* variants do not occur at all.²⁷

- (12) a. DÖT 2r19 *balyas-ār* 'town/city-INSTR', WM *balyasun-iyar*, WO *balyasun-yēr*, Kalm. *балһсар*;
 b. DÖT 34r14 *emč-īr* 'doctor-INSTR', WM *emči-ber*, WO *emči-bēr*, Kalm. *эмчэр*;
 c. IJS 45:4 *xār-ār* 'grace-INSTR', WM *qayira-bar*, WO *xayira-bēr*, Kalm. *хээрэр*;
 d. IJS 125:4 *yos-ōr* 'custom/manner-INSTR', WM *yosu-bar*, WO *yosu-bēr*, Kalm. *юосар*;
 e. DÖT *zōb-ō̄r* 'correct/proper-INSTR', WM *jöb-iyer*, WO *zōb-yēr*, Kalm. *зөвэр*.

The modern form of the comitative (sociative in some sources) case marker (/-/la/, /-læ/, Kalm. *-la/lə*), occurring together with the reflexive possessive, is an etymologically compound suffix which contains also the suffix of the instrumental case (/-/ar/, /-ær/): /-larən/ and /-lærən/. Today the comitative and instrumental case markers of this compound are inseparable from each other and form a single suffix (an allomorph of COM), relatively rarely attested in Written Oirat texts (13).

- (13) a. DÖT 22v13 *döü-lēr-en* 'younger.brother/sister-COM-REF.POSS', WM *degüü-lüge-ber-iyen*, WO *döü-lügē-bēr-yēn*, Kalm. *дүүлэрн*;
 b. DÖT 19r09 *albatu-lār-an* 'subject-COM-REF.POSS', WM *albatu-luy-a-bar-iyen*, WO *albatu-luyā-bēr-yēn*, Kalm. *алэглэрн*.

The traditional Written Oirat markers of genitive case are *-i* (after *n*), *-n* (after diphthongs), *-yin* (after vowels) and *-iyin* (after consonants except *n*). The suffixes in the spoken language are /-in/, /-n/, /-an/, /-æn/, /-a/ and /-æ/. The latter four forms do not exist in traditional Written Oirat, but their representations frequently occur in colloquial texts. Vowel /a/ of the suffixes can be represented in texts by *ā* and *ai*, whereas /æ/ by *ē*, *ei* and *ai* (14).

- (14) a. IJS 103:2 *zuun-ai* 'hundred-GEN', WM *јаγун-и*, WO *zuuni*, Kalm. *зууна*;
 b. IJS 103:5 *mönggön-ēi* 'silver/money-GEN', WM *mönggün-ü*, WO *mönggüni*, Kalm. *мөңгнэ*;

²⁷ E.B. Бембеев, *Лингвистическое описание памятника*, p. 55.

- c. AE *sar-ān* ‘Moon-GEN’, WM *saran-u*, *sara-yin*, WO *sarayin*, Kalm. *сарин*;
 d. AE *šin-ēn* ‘new-GEN’, WM *sine-yin*, WO *sineyin*, Kalm. *шинин*, *шинэн*;
 e. AE *oul-ān* ‘mountain-GEN’, WM *aγula-yin*, WO *oulayin*, *uulayin*, Kalm. *уулин*.

Suffix of reflexive possessive is the non-harmonising *-yēn* and *-bēn* in traditional Written Oirat, which is derived from WM *-iyan/iyen* and *-ban/ben* by similar way as the ablative and instrumental suffixes. Colloquial forms are *-ān*, *-ēn*, *-ōn*, *-ōñ* and *-n*, which correspond to the modern Oirat */-an/*, */-æn/* and */-n/* variants.

- (15) a. DÖT 23v05 *ax-ān* ‘older.brother-REF.POSS’, WM *aq-a-ban*, WO *axa-bēn*, Kalm. *ахан*;
 b. BB 87:12 *cayi-γān* ‘tea-REF.POSS’, WM *cai-ban*, WO *cai-bēn*, Kalm. *цэдхэн*;
 c. IJS 59:9 *bičig-ēn* ‘writing/document-REF.POSS’, WM *bičig-iyen*, WO *bičiq-yēn*, Kalm. *бичгэн*.

There are some typical imperative forms of the Oirat dialects, which also occur in Written Oirat texts. Imperatives */-tən/* and */-it/* express polite and formal request to 2SG or 2PL. Both morphemes are derived from the 2PL personal pronoun */ta/*.

- (16) a. IJS 25:6 *iizü-tən* ‘see-IMPER.POL’, Kalm. *үзтн*;
 b. IJS 59:10 *öq-tön* ‘give-IMPER.POL’, Kalm. *өгтн*;
 c. IJS 59:10 *sur-tun* ‘ask-IMPER.POL’, Kalm. *суртн*;
 d. IJS 21:4 *sur-ita* ‘ask-IMPER.POL’, Kalm. *суритн*.

Morphosyntax

The basic structure of expressing possession in Mongolian languages is formed by attaching the marker of the genitive case to the possessor, which precedes the possessed noun. Marking the possessor on the noun itself by a suffix is known, but far less common in Mongolian languages. Unlike other Mongolian languages where the latter structure is missing or has very limited use, modern Oirat dialects have developed and used the complete system of personal possessive markers. These markers which have been derived from the genitive (or nominative) case form of the personal pronouns are practically unknown in traditional Written Oirat (similarly to Written Mongolian), but relatively frequently attested in some of the sources discussed here (17).

- (17) a. IJS 12:3 *bičig-ēs-tən* ‘writing/document-ABL-POSS.2’, WM *bičig-eče tanu*, WO *bičiq-ēce tani*, Kalm. *бичгэстн*;
 b. BB 86:12 *mörin-biden* ‘horse-POSS.1PL’, WM *morin bidan-u/manu*, WO *morin bideni/mani*, Kalm. *мөрмдн*.

Similarly to personal possessive markers, personal predicative markers are also characteristic to Oirat. These suffixes are derived from the personal pronouns, too, and indicate the grammatical person and number of the subject when they are attached to the finite form of verbs or nominal predicates. The modern Kalmyk forms are the following ones: 1SG *-в/б*, 2SG *-ч/-м*, 3SG \emptyset , 1PL *-вдн/видн*, 2PL *-ч*, 3PL \emptyset .

Although personal predicative markers are not typical in traditional Written Oirat texts, their first traces are attested in monuments from the 17th century. The use of personal predicative markers is very common in later Oirat sources (as it is visible also on the example of documents discussed here), but highly depends on the content of the text. The markers are either written attached to the predicate or separately.

- (18) a. IJS 109:2 *sonos-ba-bi* ‘hear-PRAET.PERF-1SG’, WM **sonusba bi*, WO **sonosbo(i) bi*, Kalm. *сонсув*;
 b. IJS *ülü bayi-n=u ta* ‘NEG be-PRAES.IMP=INT.PART 2SG’ (‘won’t you please (do sg)’), WM **ülü bayin-a uu ta*, WO **ülü bayinuu ta*, Kalm. **үл бээнүт*;
 c. BB 86:5 *xono-ba bide* ‘spend.the.night-PRAET.PERF 1PL’, WM *qonuba bida*, WO **xonobo(i) bide*, Kalm. *хонувдн*.

Conclusions

The examples taken from the four sources discussed here demonstrate that Zaya Pandita’s Clear script performs well in writing down the spoken tongue of the Oirats, and Written Oirat texts provide a large amount of information on the features and peculiarities of the contemporary language. The next step of the research on the history of Oirat dialects is to create a searchable corpus of Written Oirat monuments from different periods and different areas. A corpus of glossed texts and commented translations will be suitable for further linguistic and comparative analysis.

Abbreviations

WM Written Mongolian (i.e. Classical Mongolian)
 WO Written Oirat
 Kalm. Kalmyk

1	1 st person	IMP	imperfect	PL	plural
2	2 nd person	IMPER	imperative	POL	polite
3	3 rd person	INSTR	instrumental	POSS	possessive
ABL	ablative	INT	interrogative	PRAES	praesens (present-future)
ADV	adverb (converb)	MOD	modal	PREAT	praeteritum (past)
CAUS	causative	NEG	negation	REFL	reflexive
COM	comitative	NOM	nomen (participle)	SG	singular
FUT	future	PART	particle	SOC	sociative
GEN	genitive	PERF	perfect		