

# SPOKEN **SIBE**

MORPHOLOGY  
OF THE INFLECTED  
PARTS  
OF SPEECH

VERONIKA **ZIKMUNDOVÁ**

KAROLINUM

## **Spoken Sibe**

Morphology of the Inflected Parts of Speech

**Veronika Zikmundová**

---

Reviewed by:

Bayarma Khabtagaeva-Kempf, Ph.D.

Cheng Zhi, Ph.D.

Layout and cover design Jan Šerých

Typeset by Karolinum Press

First edition

© Charles University in Prague – Karolinum Press, 2013

© Veronika Zikmundová, 2013

ISBN 978-80-246-2103-6

ISBN 978-80-246-2489-1 (online : pdf)



Charles University in Prague  
Karolinum Press 2013

<http://www.cupress.cuni.cz>



# CONTENTS

List of abbreviations	8
0 Introduction	9
1 Characteristics of spoken Sibe	20
1.1 Notes on the phonetics and phonology	20
1.1.1 Problems of the phonological description of Sibe	20
1.1.2 Previous research of the Sibe phonemic system	21
1.1.3 List of sounds in spoken Sibe	24
1.2 Questions of transcription	28
1.3 Remarks on the Sibe vocabulary	29
1.3.1 Personal names	31
1.3.2 Children's expressions	32
1.3.3 Vicarious expressions	32
1.4 Remarks on syntax – negation	32
1.4.1 The negative particle aq <sup>ù</sup>	33
1.4.2 The negative particle vaq	34
1.5 Word classes in spoken Sibe	35
1.5.1 Brief characteristics of the parts of speech	37
2 The Noun	41
2.1 The category of number	41
2.1.1 Generic number	42
2.1.2 Partial number	43
2.1.3 Specific forms of the use of the partial number	45
2.1.4 Expressing plurality through lexical means	46
2.2 The category of case	48
2.2.1 Nominative	50
2.2.2 Genitive	52
2.2.3 Dative-locative	55
2.2.4 Accusative	60
2.2.5 Ablative	64
2.2.6 Lative	67
2.2.7 Instrumental-sociative	69
3 Qualitative nouns	72
3.1 Qualitative nouns formed by derivational suffixes	73
3.1.2 Qualitative nouns in the function of an attribute	78
3.1.3 Qualitative nouns determining verbs	79

3.1.4	Specific grammatical categories of qualitative nouns	83
3.1.5	Other ways of expressing quality, appearance, etc.	85
3.1.6	Vicarious qualitative nouns and other anaphoric expressions	87
4	Pronouns	93
4.1	Personal pronouns	93
4.1.1	Personal pronouns in nominative	94
4.1.2	Personal pronouns in genitive	95
4.1.3	Personal pronouns in dative	95
4.1.4	Personal pronouns in accusative	95
4.1.5	Personal pronouns in ablative	96
4.1.6	Personal pronouns in lative	96
4.1.7	Personal pronouns in instrumental-sociative	96
4.2	Remarks on the personal pronouns	97
4.3	Demonstrative pronouns	102
4.3.1	The demonstrative pronouns <i>ər</i> and <i>tər</i>	102
4.3.2	The pronouns <i>mər</i> and <i>mətər</i>	104
4.3.3	The pronouns <i>ək</i> and <i>səkai /skai</i>	105
4.4	Interrogative pronouns	107
4.4.1	The pronoun 'ai'	107
4.4.2	The pronoun <i>ya</i> – 'which' as an attribute	108
4.4.3	The pronoun <i>yam</i> (< <i>ya əm</i> – 'which one')	108
4.4.4	The pronoun <i>yamkən</i> ('which one' – an independent part of speech)	109
4.4.5	The pronoun <i>və</i> ('who')	109
4.5	Notes on demonstrative and interrogative pronouns	109
5	Numerals	112
5.1	The cardinal numerals	113
5.2	The ordinal numerals	113
5.3	The idiomatic use of numerals	114
6	Spatials	115
6.1	The spatial system in written Manchu	115
6.1.1	The spatial roots in written Manchu	115
6.1.2	The spatial suffixes in written Manchu	116
6.1.3	Meaning and use of the Manchu spatial suffixes	117
6.2	The spatial system in spoken Sibe	119
6.2.1	Spatial roots in spoken Sibe	119
6.2.2	Spatial suffixes in spoken Sibe	119
6.2.3	The use of Sibe spatial	120
6.2.4	The suffix <i>-bi</i>	122
6.2.5	The suffix <i>-š</i>	122
6.2.6	Temporal use of spatial	124
7	The verb	126
7.1	The verbal system of spoken Sibe	126
7.1.1	The problem of definition of the finite verbs in Sibe	128
7.1.2	The delayed personal pronoun	130
7.1.3	Verbum existentiae	131
7.1.4	Negation of verbal forms	131
7.1.5	Question	133
7.2	Finite verbs	136
7.2.1	The imperfect verb <i>-m(-i-e)</i> (praesens imperfecti)	137
7.2.2	The progressive verb <i>-meye</i>	140

7.2.3 The progressive verb <i>-m-a-ʁ-ʔi(e)</i> (PROG.II)	141
7.2.4 The perfective verb <i>-ʁ<sup>o</sup>i(e)</i> , <i>-ʁ<sup>o</sup>i(e)</i> and its allomorphs	142
7.2.5 The verbal form expressing a forthcoming action – <i>m-ũʁ<sup>o</sup>i</i>	143
7.3 Imperative and optative forms	144
7.3.1 Command for the second-person – imperative	144
7.3.2 Polite imperative <i>-mə</i> (benedictive)	147
7.3.3 Voluntative	147
7.3.4 Optative <i>-kiñi</i>	148
7.4 Verbal nouns	149
7.4.1 The imperfective verbal noun <i>-r</i> (nomen imperfecti)	149
7.4.2 Perfective verbal noun <i>-h</i> (nomen perfecti)	155
7.4.3 The progressive verbal noun <i>-maʁ</i>	158
7.4.4 Verbal nouns II	158
7.5 Converbs	162
7.5.1 The imperfective converb <i>-m(ə)</i> (converbum imperfecti)	163
7.5.2 The perfective converb <i>-maq</i> (converbum perfecti)	170
7.5.3 The perfective converb <i>-f(ie)/-f(ə)</i>	174
7.5.4 The conditional converb <i>-či</i> (converbum conditionale)	174
7.5.5 Terminative converb <i>-čiñi</i>	177
7.6 Deverbal suffixes	178
7.6.1 The causative suffix <i>-v</i>	178
7.6.2 Beginning of an action: the suffix <i>-mači-</i>	181
7.7 Vicarious verbs	182
 Acknowledgments	 186
 Appendix	 187
 Vocabulary	 204
 References	 227
 Summary	 230

# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACC.	– Accusative case suffix
ACT.	– Actualizing particle
BEN.	– Benedictive
CC.	– Conditional converb suffix
CI.	– Imperfective converb
CP.	– Perfective converb
CT.	– Terminative converb
DL.	– Dative-locative
DOUB.	– Doubling
ECHO	– Echo doubling
EMP.	– Emphatic vowel
F.	– Foregrounding particle
GEN.	– Genitive
GEN.II	– Genitive form used to appropriate sb. or sth. to a person or object which itself is appropriated to sb.
IMP.	– Praesens imperfecti
IMPER.	– Imperative
INC.	– Inceptive verbal form
IS.	– Instrumental-sociative
LAT.	– Lative case suffix
LIM.	– Limiting particle
NEG.	– Particle of negation
NEG.EX.	– Negative existential
NI.II	– Imperfective verbal noun II
NI.	– Imperfective verbal noun
NP.	– Perfective verbal noun
NP.II	– Perfective verbal noun II
NPROG.II	– Progressive verbal noun II
MOD.	– Suffix with the meaning of modulation and slight emphasis
ONOM.	– Onomatopoeic expression
PERF.	– Perfective verb (finite form)
POSS.	– 3 <sup>rd</sup> person enclitic possessive pronoun
PROB.	– Particle of probability, suggestion etc.
PROG.	– Progressive verb
S.G.	– Suffix of a separately standing genitive form
QUEST.	– Interrogative particle
QUOT.	– Quotation particle



# 0 INTRODUCTION

In the present work I attempt to describe one of the subsystems of the grammatical structure of the Sibe language, the morphology of the flexible parts of speech, to the extent and depth as the collected material and my own experience with the language has allowed. In the course of the description I have attempt, when possible, to put the given idiom into the context of literary Manchu and Mongolian, and to perceive it within the context of communication. I also discuss some problems of interpretation, mainly the classification of parts of speech.

Sibe is a Tungusic language closely related to classical Manchu. The Jungarian Sibes, who at present live in the north-west of Xinjiang, are in fact the last speakers of the Manchu language. Although around 20 thousand Sibes still speak their language, Sibe deserves to be labelled as an endangered language for a number of reasons. Several descriptions of the basic grammatical structure of spoken Sibe have been published, and parts of grammar have been studied in detail. Still, there is a persistant need of a thorough description of the language as a whole, which is becoming more urgent with the decreasing level of its knowledge among the Sibe speakers themselves.

The present description is based mainly on authentic language material gathered during my fieldwork among the Sibes in Xinjiang. I have focused on the description of the two most clearly defined parts of vocabulary, previously analyzed in depth in the context of various Altaic languages – the nouns and the verbs.

In addition to this main contribution I also give the brief general characteristics of the morphology of spoken Sibe, and I attempt a tentative classification of the parts of speech and their syntactical characteristics. All of the described features are accompanied by examples drawn from the language material collected in the course of my fieldwork in Xinjiang.

A sample of texts in spoken Sibe with translations is appended. It is intended to supplement the description presented here of the language with characteristics of higher than the morphosyntactical level – the text structure, idiomaticity, some poetical and other special means of expression, humour, etc.

Comparison with Mongolian suggests itself for a few reasons: Above all spoken Sibe and its historical predecessors have repeatedly been subjected to the strong influence of the Mongolic languages, and all levels of the language show remarkable typological correspondences with Mongolian. Since there is not enough space for systematic comparison in this work, I attempt

to point out parallels and analogies, as well as differences, between spoken Sibe and Khalkha Mongolian in the course of the description.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from the structure of the language I attempt to describe its use in communication as well. I comment on the pragmatics of the oral language and on the various conditions and background of its actual usage. This is a result of the observation that while Sibe is the main and fully functional means of communication for the older generation of speakers, competence in the language rapidly decreases with age. It is very likely that in the course of the next few decades spoken Sibe will be on the verge of extinction, and it is therefore important to record it in as much detail as possible in its full form existing at present, together with the communication context which undergoes changes as drastically as the language itself.

## The Sibe people and their language

The self-appellation of the Sibe people is pronounced *Šiva*,<sup>2</sup> the official Chinese term is *Xibo*, in Russian literature the terms *sibin'ci* / *šibin'ci* are used, while in the English works the name 'Sibe' has been established, which corresponds to the written form. The Jungarian Sibes are part of the larger Sibe ethnic group, whom the earliest records situate in south-eastern Manchuria (the Changbaishan mountain range). At present the Manchurian Sibes live mostly in the provinces of Girin (Jilin) and Mukden (Shenyang), numbering around 100,000 persons.<sup>3</sup> These Sibes lost the Sibe language at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1764, a segment of the of the Sibe population was commanded by the Emperor Qianlong to settle in the Ili area of Xinjiang, which had been depopulated by the Jungar wars. The descendants of these Sibes now number around 30,000 individuals, and the greater part of them have retained their traditions and use the Sibe language as their mother-tongue.

The language of this ethnic group, which I refer to as spoken or oral Sibe, may be considered one of the Manchu dialects. Since the Manchu language of Manchuria is on the verge of extinction, the Sibe people are the only heirs to the Manchu language and culture.

The spoken Sibe language, despite its unique position as an oral form of Manchu, has been the subject of relatively little research. Most of the fieldwork conducted among the Sibe people has been focused on various aspects of their culture, in particular the Sibe folklore, music, literature and religion. Apart from a few grammatical descriptions, several publications of materials of the spoken language and dictionaries have significantly contributed to the study of spoken Sibe. Complex descriptions and deep analyses of the grammar, however, are still lacking.

<sup>1</sup> I take Khalkha Mongolian as the basis for comparison, because it is the only codified oral form of Mongolian and I do not have sufficient knowledge of any other Mongolian dialect. For further comparative work it will be necessary to work with the Khorchin dialect of Mongolian, which historically was in close contacts with Sibe during certain periods and which forms the main source of Mongolian loanwords in both Manchu and Sibe. The differences between the Mongolian dialects are not crucial for the typological correspondences, but are relevant for the study of vocabulary, idiomatics and communicative behaviour.

<sup>2</sup> For the details of transcription see the section No. 1.2 Questions of transcription.

<sup>3</sup> According to L. M. Gorelova, in Heilongjiang province there are Sibes who may still have some knowledge of their language (Gorelova 2002, p. 31).

---

## Brief summary of the history of the Sibes<sup>4</sup>

The early history of the Sibe people is subject to speculation. Following their language and cultural closeness to the Manchus, the Sibes were originally regarded as one of the Jurchen tribes (An, Wu, Zhao pp. 21–23). Modern Sibe historians have advanced a theory about the Xianbei affiliation of the Sibe tribe (An, Wu, Zhao, pp. 13–58).<sup>5</sup> This change of view, however, seems to have a certain political background.

The earliest historical records, which can be unambiguously identified with the present-day Sibe ethnic group, date from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the Sibe people were living as a vassal tribe of an eastern Mongolian group, the Khorchins. At that time the Sibes were settled in the Changbaishan mountains (Ma. Golmin šanggiyan alin) in south-eastern Manchuria. Those Sibe historians, who suggest the Xianbei origin of the Sibes, suppose that in the earlier stages of their history the Sibe tribe lived in Western Manchuria, in the region known today as Hölönbuir (An, Wu, Zhao, pp. 57–60).

During the reign of the Emperor Kangxi, the Sibes were persuaded by the Manchus to separate from the Khorchins. In the following period they were resettled from the Changbaishan mountains (allegedly due to their unruly character) and divided among Manchu administration centres – Girin, Mukden and Guihua (present Hohhot). According to the Sibe tradition, they were valued by the Manchu Emperors for their warlike character and courage in battle. The Sibe banners became a part of the New Manchu military formation. In 1764, following a decree of the Emperor Qianlong, a group of the New Manchus, consisting mostly of the Sibe banners, moved to the newly conquered areas of the former Dzungar Khanate. The movement to Xinjiang, which dispersed families and clans, the hard journey through Mongolia and other aspects of the whole event subsequently found a rich reflection in the Sibe popular history, folklore and written narratives. After a year-long journey and several resettlements inside Dzungaria the New Manchus settled along the left bank of the Ili River in an area known as Chabchal (Mo. Čavčaal, Chin. Chabuchaer). The Sibe soldiers were put in charge of the border fortresses along most of the north-western border of Xinjiang, and were also compelled to man the Imperial garrisons in the Uighur cities of the Tarim basin.

During the next two hundred years the Sibe banners played an important role in the suppression of the anti-Manchu (in the last case anti-Chinese) rebellions of the local people. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century smaller detachments of the Sibe soldiers were moved to other places in the vicinity of Ili, the most distant being that of Tarbagatai (Mo. Tarbagatai, Uig. Čöčäk, Chin. Tacheng).<sup>6</sup> During the 20<sup>th</sup> century many Sibes settled in Ghulja city.

The Ili valley forms part of the former Jungar Khanate and of the geographical unit called the Jungar basin, therefore the local Sibe enclave has been generally known as the Jungarian Sibes.

---

<sup>4</sup> To my knowledge, so far the most detailed study on Sibe history is the book *Sibe ukurai šolokon suduri* by native scholars (An, Wu, Zhao 1985). Among Western scholars, L. M. Gorelova (2002, pp. 32–45) and Lebedeva discuss the subject extensively.

<sup>5</sup> The only possibility to trace the Sibe history to earlier times is to admit their relationship to the Shiwei tribal union. More on this topic see in e.g. Gorelova 2002, Janhunen 1996.

<sup>6</sup> The Sibe enclaves outside Chabchal, namely those of Huocheng (Iče Gazn), Gongliu, Nilka and Tarbagatai, have been under a stronger influence of the neighbouring peoples, mostly the Khazakhs. After the massive exodus of the Khazakhs to Kazakhstan in 1962, the Khazakh cultural heritage was gradually overcome by the ever-present Chinese influence.

The river Ili separates the Chabchal region from the city of Ghulja,<sup>7</sup> which was one of the traditional administrative centres of Jungaria as a whole. The western border of Chabchal is formed by the mountain range of Usun,<sup>8</sup> which forms the border with Khazakhstan. The Ili valley is, thanks to its relatively moist climate, the most fertile part of Xinjiang. Chabchal, irrigated by the Chabchal canal<sup>9</sup> with the water from Ili, has been an important agricultural area.

Until the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the Manchus conquered Jungaria and the Tarim basin and created a new administrative unit with a military government, corresponding to the present-day Xinjiang, the mountain pastures of the Ili region were inhabited by the remnants of the western-Mongolian Oirat tribes (mainly the Choros, Khoshuud, Dörbet, Torghuut and Khoit). During Manchu rule the ethnic composition of the inhabitants in Ili greatly changed. Muslim farmers were moved from the Tarim oases to provide food supply for the Manchu army.<sup>10</sup> Part of the Chakhar Mongols was moved from southern Mongolia to Xinjiang and settled near Lake Sayram on a plateau above the Ili valley. During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries nomadic Kazakh and Kirghiz as well as Uzbek farmers moved gradually to the area. As the result of the Russian conquest of Siberia many Russian, Tatar, Nogai and Central Asian Jews gradually resettled in Ili. The Russian influence in the Ili area culminated during the rule of Sheng Shicai (1933–1944)<sup>11</sup> and the Second East Turkestan Republic (1944–1949).

This multiethnic and multi-cultural milieu existed until the 1950s, when after the entry of the Maoist army, cruel repressions of all non-Han inhabitants began to be enforced. During the Cultural Revolution it was forbidden to teach the Sibe language and the Manchu script, the shamans and Buddhist monks were persecuted and the artifacts and religious and cult implements were destroyed. The Cultural Revolution caused an entire generation of the Sibes grow up without knowledge of the Manchu script and with a limited knowledge of spoken Sibe.

Thus during the past 400 years, the Sibe people changed their abodes, language and cultural environment several times. Sibe culture has absorbed a large number of influences, which can be seen today in their folklore and literature.

## Contacts and influences

The oldest roots of Sibe culture are presumed to lie in the ethnically and culturally diverse milieu of the half-settled hunters, fishermen and herders of Middle Manchuria. The Sibe scholars, judging from information in the oldest layer of folklore, place the ancestral homeland<sup>12</sup> of the tribe to the forested mountains of the Hinggan range. In any case the importance of clans, the role of shamans, the cults of wild and domestic animals and veneration

<sup>7</sup> Uighur *Ghulja*, Mongolian *Ili hot* and Chinese *Yi ning shi*.

<sup>8</sup> Ma. *Usun alin*, Uighur *Uzun tagh*, Chin, *Wusun shan*.

<sup>9</sup> The Chabchal canal was dug in the year 1808, 44 years after the arrival of the Sibe people to Ili, by the amban Tukšan. After their arrival the Sibes were settled on the left bank of the Ili, which was fertile and suitable for farming, but was lacking water. Therefore the beginnings in Chabchal were hard for the newcomers. In 1802 the amban Tukšan, followed by his clan members, started to dig the irrigation canal. For four years they wdug, with their own hands, the canal which transformed Chabchal into a uniquely fertile area and which ultimately turned the Sibe enclave into one of the richest places in Xinjiang. The amban Tukšan – known as Tu amban – has become one of the nation's heroes.

<sup>10</sup> This Uighur population became known as the Taranči – an Oirat-Mongolian word for a farmer.

<sup>11</sup> Sheng Shicai exercised pro-Soviet policy until 1942, when he expelled the Soviet advisors.

<sup>12</sup> *ba na* lit. 'place earth', interpreted as the 'ancestral homeland' by native scholars, seems to be an important concept even in the oldest folk songs (Zhonglu, personal communication 2002).

---

of numerous spirits link the Sibe culture to that of the Manchus and the Daghurs.<sup>13</sup> There are two folksongs,<sup>14</sup> which are perceived by all Jungarian Sibes as the most ancient ones – the songs *Yačina* (the meaning of the title is unclear) and *Domdoqun ucun* ('The Butterfly Song'). The lyrics of these songs recall the lifestyle of forest hunters and fishermen and is not fully comprehensible to modern Sibes. It is also not clear on what occasions they were originally performed. Their melody and rhythm considerably differ from most of the later songs.

Similarly, the lullaby used by all Sibes, as well as some of the shaman songs, seem to come from the most ancient layer of the cultural heritage of the Jungarian Sibes.

Later, in the times of their vassalage to the Khorchins, the Sibes absorbed some features of the Khorchin shamanic cult, which, it appears, developed a previously non-existing stratification and hierarchy under the influence of Buddhism. They also adopted Buddhism in the earliest stage of its spread among the Khorchins, with Classical Mongolian as a liturgical language.<sup>15</sup> The influence of the Khorchin Mongols was in many respects more direct and profound on the Sibes than on the Manchus. One part of Sibe folklore is thought to bear<sup>16</sup> traces of Mongolian influence, as some wedding songs and many shaman songs, melodies for the traditional dance known as *bəylən* (cf. Mo. *bielgee*) etc.

After the Sibes left the Changbaishan mountain and re-settled in the great Manchu garrison cities, they came into intensive contact with the Chinese-influenced Manchu culture. This led to the emergence of a clear-cut and important layer of culture.<sup>17</sup>

After their arrival to Xinjiang, the position of the Sibes as a garrison of the army of occupation significantly hindered the possibility of contact with the local inhabitants, particularly the settled Muslim farmers. In fact the first significant contacts with the Uighurs do not date to earlier than to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After the arrival of the tribe to Xinjiang, the Sibe culture underwent an interesting development. Some parts of their cultural heritage, which they brought to their new home, were gradually lost, while others were intentionally handed down and developed in new directions.

The relatively modern layer in the traditional Sibe culture has formed after the arrival to Xinjiang, when the separation from the homeland and relatives, the wars with the Uighurs during various rebellions<sup>18</sup> and the Russian occupation of Ili<sup>19</sup> became the main motives in their folklore. A specific literary form, typical for the Jungarian Sibes, is the *julən* (Lit. Ma. *julun*), an extensive epic poem on mostly historical topics.<sup>20</sup> Among the most famous *juləns*

---

<sup>13</sup> As it follows from studies of Manchurian ethnic history (e.g. Janhunen 1996), great ethnic diversity had existed in the region until the beginning of the Manchu expansion. Investigations of the modern remnants of this plurality show that the languages and cultures of the various tribes and ethnic groups experienced considerable cross-contact, forming a distinct cultural complex of which the Sibes were an integral part.

<sup>14</sup> A valuable study of the Sibe folk music has been published by the British ethnomusicologist Rachel Harris (Harris 2005).

<sup>15</sup> Sibe Buddhism seems to be one of the least studied topics within the Sibe culture. The last Sibe Buddhist monk, who left the monastery when he was 14, died in 1999. When I interviewed him in 1994, he recited to me several short texts in Classical Mongolian and wrote a mantra in Mongolian and Sanscrit. It seems that Classical Mongolian played here a role similar to the role of Tibetan in the Mongolian Gelugpa tradition.

<sup>16</sup> I have heard this 'periodization' of the Sibe folklore heritage from several members of the Sibe language community, and I consider it to be part of a tradition which, dealing with the relatively recent past, may have a certain historical value.

<sup>17</sup> The native scholars believe, that before this the Sibe tribe lived beyond the reach of Chinese influence and that all the important Sino-Manchu features in their culture date from the 16<sup>th</sup> century and later.

<sup>18</sup> Especially the great Muslim rebellion in the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>19</sup> An almost ten year period in the 70s of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>20</sup> A similar literary form is found among the Manchurian Daghurs (Bilid, Soijim, Bilig, 1987: *Dayur ulamjilal-tu uran jokiyal*. Hohhot).

are the *Gurinjihe ućun* ('The Song of Resettlement'), *Kařgar-i ućun* ('The Song of Kashgar') and *Lasihiyantu-i ućun* ('The Song of Lasihiyantu').<sup>21</sup> Many *julāns*, namely the earlier ones, have developed from folk songs, but many, especially those more recent, have been authorial compositions. Famous *julāns* were handed down the families, but generally the composition of *julāns* seems to have been a widespread form of art, and chanting the *julāns* used to be a common entertainment for winter nights.<sup>22</sup>

A special chapter in the Sibe history are the contacts with Russians, which, although hostile in the beginning (Russians were in fact the invaders against which the border had to be defended), by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century turned into an intensive trade relationship and cultural exchange. The main traded goods were pigs,<sup>23</sup> bred by the Sibes and sought by the Russians, and, from the Russian occupation on, opium<sup>24</sup> as well. The city of Ghulja was in fact built by the Russians and some Russian settlers lived in Chabchal itself. The Sibe community in Ghulja is important from the point of view of cultural syncretism. Starting from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, members of rich and influential Sibe families lived in this mainly Russian and Uighur, city; they formed a kind of secondary aristocracy. These Sibes, who valued education and culture as much as material wealth and military skills, maintained contacts above all with the Russians, the Tatars and the Nogais, but also with the Uighur aristocracy.<sup>25</sup> Through these contacts elements of Russian and other cultures began to spread among the Sibe people.

## Dialectal position of spoken Sibe

The problem of the position of spoken Sibe among the dialects of Manchu has been discussed only rarely,<sup>26</sup> clearly for the reason of the lack of available comparative material of oral Manchu. Materials of great interest relevant to this topic have been published by Chao Ke and Zhao Aping in the book *Heilongjiang xiandai Manyu yanjiu – Sahaliyan ula ne bisire manju gisun be sibkihe bithe* (*Study of the present-day Manchu language in the Amur region – Chao Ke, Zhao Aping 2001*). This publication presents samples of materials of four Manchu dialects, designated as Alecuha, Bala, Lalin and Sanjiazi (Ilan boo). The linguistic material shows that the Sanjiazi dialect is the closest to literary Manchu, while the other three dialects display divergences which the authors place into the context of the surrounding Tungusic languages and of Jurchen (the most striking being the system of teens in Alećuha numerals, which resembles the Jurchen teens<sup>27</sup> – pp. 70–72). The areal position of the dialects seems to support the idea that the dialects Bala, Alecuha and Lalin, besides being under the influence of other Tungusic languages, also retained some archaic features of the Jurchen language. On the other hand the Sanjiazi dialect is spoken in an area close to the traditional Sibe homeland.

<sup>21</sup> The *julāns* mentioned above have been translated by Prof. Stary into German.

<sup>22</sup> Even at present reports are heard that one or another old man has written a *julān*, and occasionally even young people know how to read and chant them.

<sup>23</sup> Not only the Xinjiang Muslims, but also the nomadic Mongols of the Ili area neither bred nor ate pork.

<sup>24</sup> The growing and subsequent use of opium became a threat for the whole Sibe population and had to be forcibly stopped at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>25</sup> Descendants of these families are known for their multilingualism, which caused the spread of a reputation of the Sibe people as polyglots.

<sup>26</sup> L. M. Gorelova mentions the opinion of the Sibe scholar An Jun that spoken Sibe is particularly close to the Ilan Boo (Sanjiazi) dialect of Manchu.

<sup>27</sup> For teens in Jurchen and Manchu cf. Janhunen 1993.

---

I had been told previously by a Sibe scholar who visited Sanjiazi that he was able to communicate in his native language with the Manchu speakers.<sup>28</sup> I had the same experience in 2007, when I was able to converse with a Manchu speaker in Sanjiazi using Sibe. Taking into account the somewhat limited language competence of the speaker caused by the fact that she had not used Manchu in everyday communication for a long time, the difference between the Sanjiazi Manchu and the Jungarian Sibe of the octogenarian speakers was minor and should be partly ascribed to the Chinese influence being heavier in Sanjiazi than in Chabchal.

Since the main body of Manchu upon which the literary language was based had ceased to exist before the start of the field research in China<sup>29</sup> and all materials available at present come from the margins of the Manchu language area, it may be justified to assume that the Sibe language, which is apparently close to literary Manchu, is the descendant of the central or official Manchu dialect.

Another indirect source of information concerning the relationship of Manchu and Sibe may be the account of a Daghur soldier from Manchuria, who came to Ili during the great Muslim rebellion, and described his first meeting with the Sibes saying, that he suddenly heard several people talking in ‘our Manchu language’ (Donjina 1989, p. 31).

It may be concluded that spoken Sibe, except for the strong influence of Khorchin Mongol manifested mainly on the lexical level, is most likely a descendant of the Manchu coinée.

## Previous research of spoken Sibe

Various aspects of the Sibe language and culture have been explored by researchers in China by both ethnic Sibe and Chinese scholars. All of them are to be found in the bibliography of Manchu Studies by G. Stary. Here I would like to mention the ‘classical’ reference books for Sibe studies – the Sibe Ethnography (Ma. *Sibe uksurai an tacin*) and the Short history of the Sibe nation (Ma. *Sibe uksurai šolokon suduri*).<sup>30</sup> An important study of Sibe shamanism was published by Kicešan (Qicheshan 2011) and a monumental collection of Sibe folklore by Zhonglu is hopefully forthcoming.

Outside China, Russia has the longest tradition in Sibe studies, which started with the phenomenal collection of Sibe folk texts by Fedor Muromskij (Kałużyński 1977). This work has been further developed by the Manchurologists Tatiana Pang, Liliya M. Gorelova, Konstantin S. Yahontov and others.

In Japan the tradition of Sibe studies begins with Kengo Yamamoto in the 1960s; similarly, several young Japanese scholars have been conducting research into Sibe last years. A Sibe scholar living in Japan – Kicengge (Chengzhi) – has published several studies of Manchu and Sibe history based on early Qing documents.

In Europe, the Italian Manchurologist Professor Giovanni Stary is the most deserving of praise due to his extensive research and publication activities concerning the Sibe nation. Besides numerous specialized articles, mainly on Sibe literature and history, and several overviews of Sibe studies, Professor Stary translated most of the relevant texts in written

---

<sup>28</sup> Kicengge, personal communication, 1999.

<sup>29</sup> During several years immediately preceding the Cultural revolution extensive field research was pursued among the non-Han nationalities in Northern China and valuable materials of the minority languages were recorded. Thanks to this effort, records of Manchu spoken by that time in the marginal areas, namely Heilongjiang, have been preserved in China.

<sup>30</sup> The last book has been translated and published by G. Stary.

Sibe published in Xinjiang into European languages. His monumental bibliography of Manchu studies contains all works concerning the Sibe ethnic group, published both in and outside China.

Aspects of Sibe culture have been studied by Alessandra Pozzi<sup>31</sup> (Italy) and Rachel Harris (UK).<sup>32</sup>

As mentioned before, spoken Sibe has been viewed either as a Manchu dialect, or as an oral variation of Manchu proper. Until recently the living Sibe language had been the object of relatively little study and complex descriptions of grammar have yet to be published. The majority of the publications relevant to spoken Sibe are dictionaries and editions of commented and analyzed texts of the oral language.

The oldest source for spoken Sibe is the *Man'čžurskaja chrestomatia* (Manchu Reader) by A. O. Ivanovskij (Ivanovskij 1895), which contains two oral Sibe texts. A collection of spoken language materials, unique in content as well as a linguistic document, are the texts which were recorded in Chabchal by F. Muromskij at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and later published by the Polish scholar S. Kałużyński (1977).

Several oral Sibe texts have been published during the last decades. The most important of these are the record of a folktale 'The Young Man and the Fairy' with parallel literal and free translations and a list of nominal and verbal formants by the Chinese scholar Li Shulan (1986), and two works by the Sibe author Jin Ning, particularly the edition of the 'Legend of blackening the face' in transcription and translation into literary Manchu and English (Jin Ning 1991) and the *Sibe-English Conversations*, which contains an abundant selection of phrases used in daily communication (Jin Ning 1993).

The Sibe-English dictionary by K. Yamamoto including a detailed phonetic analysis has not yet been surpassed. Among several dictionaries published in China the most important and useful is the monolingual dictionary published in Urumchi in 1987 (*Sibe 'manju' gisun-i buleku bithe*, 1987).

The linguistic research of 'real'<sup>33</sup> spoken Sibe in the West began, for all intents and purposes, with the description by Jerry Norman (Norman 1974). His informants were the members of a Sibe family living in Taiwan. The work of Prof. Norman includes a detailed description of the phonology and morphology of the spoken language and, with minor divergences caused mainly by the different age of the informants, precisely fits with my experience with the Sibe speakers. The part concerning morphology is limited to the list and characteristic of the nominal and verbal suffixes.

The collective work of Chinese and Sibe authors Li Shulan, Zhongqian and Wang Qingfeng (Li Shulan 1984), comprises a detailed phonetic, phonological and morphological description with examples and a Sibe-Chinese vocabulary. The description is based on rich material collected by fieldwork. Apparently the material was collected among speakers with high competency in literary Manchu and some of the forms found in the work would not be typical for the speech of less educated speakers.

The Polish linguist S. Kałużyński, who edited the unique materials collected by F. Muromskij, later published a brief morphological description of the language of these

<sup>31</sup> For the first detailed study on Sibe shaman beliefs, see Pozzi 1992.

<sup>32</sup> The recently published book by Rachel Harris presents rare materials of Sibe folk and especially shaman songs and an important study of the Sibe folk culture in general (Harris 2005).

<sup>33</sup> Some authors in speaking about Sibe, refer not to the Sibe vernacular, but to the pronunciation of the written language by the Sibes which only slightly differs from written Manchu.



---

materials (Kałużyński 1987). According to the interpretation of contemporary Sibe scholars (Kicengge 1994 – personal communication) the records of F. Muromskij seem to reflect the pronunciation of the written language<sup>34</sup> and not of the contemporary spoken language, which could not be so different from the modern vernacular. In his interesting and unconventional Manchu reader the Polish Manchurologist Jerzy Tulisow uses constructions of the living language and every-day communication, which makes the grammatical thinking of Manchu accessible to the reader. The author has also visited the Jungarian Sibe.

The Chinese scholar Wang Xiaohong and the Sibe author Guo Meilan published an analysis of the phonological structure of the oral Sibe language (Wang, Guo, 1985).

Among Manchurological works which apply to Sibe I would mention the Manchu reader with an overview of grammar and explanation of idiomatics by Gerthraude Roth-Li, which contains texts of modern Sibe. The comprehensive Manchu Grammar by L. M. Gorelova presents useful historical and demographic information about the Sibe ethnic group, and uses comparative material of Evenki, Nanai, literary and spoken Sibe in addition to literary Manchu.

I would also like to draw attention to an interesting publication by Zhang Bo, which, though it does not concern spoken Sibe, is a unique and remarkable attempt. This textbook of spoken Manchu, written by a young ethnic Manchu, is not a record of the existing spoken language but an original work meant to ‘revive’ Manchu by basing its analysis on the written form and inventing new expressions when possible and needed. This publication, though striking by intentionally not taking into account any existing vernacular related to Manchu, is the admirable and courageous effort of a talented young linguist.

Finally, a description and analysis of the grammar – phonetics, phonology, morphology, and syntax – of both spoken and written Sibe has recently been published by the Korean scholar Jang Taeho. The author, in addition to using modern methods of Western linguistics, utilizes as well his linguistic insight as a native speaker of Korean, a language whose grammar is in some ways close to that of Manchu and Sibe. Jang Taeho’s work is a result of 10 years of the study of oral Sibe, during which he has gained an active command of the language. Jang Taeho’s book is at present the only existing complex description of spoken Sibe written with the use of Western linguistic approaches. Unfortunately for many Western linguists, the main part of the book is written in Chinese. A textbook of spoken Sibe has been recently published in Tokyo (Kubo 2011).

In writing the present work I relied, in addition to the above-mentioned works and the collected language materials, upon older Manchurological literature, mainly the works by I. Zaharov – the Manchu Grammar (Zaharov 1879) and the Manchu-Russian dictionary (Zaharov 1875). In addition to the classical Altaistic literature (Ramstedt 1957, Poppe 1960) I used comparative Tungusologic works, above all the exhaustive and critical monographs by O. P. Sunik dealing with verbs (Sunik 1962) and nouns (Sunik 1982) in the Tungusic languages.

Among descriptive works dealing with particular languages, the description of the Chakhar dialect of Mongol by the Inner Mongolian linguist B. Sechenbaatar (2003) has been very inspirational for my work. I acquired this book while writing my dissertation and the solutions concerning some problems of the application of the European language categories on the Altaic languages have been particularly helpful for the description of Sibe. Certain questions

---

<sup>34</sup> Like Mongolian, Sibe has a particular method of enonciating written texts which does not exactly reproduce the written form, but preserves the main differences from the oral language.

concerning parts of speech in Chahar (which can be applied to all Mongolian dialects) are dealt with in an especially innovative way. Since the use of grammatical methodology is practically identical in Mongolian and Sibe, I followed Sechenbaatar's classification in some crucial points of the classification of the Sibe parts of speech.

## Sources of data, methods of work

The material for this description was collected among Sibe speakers mostly in Chabchal and Urumchi. During my first study period I concentrated on gaining an active knowledge of spoken Sibe and endeavoured to obtain a deeper understanding of Sibe culture and history, an acquisition rendered possible due to the kindness of my teacher Mr. Kicengge, who taught me intensively for one year and allowed me to follow him on his field research in Chabchal. Later I spent more time collecting language material for description. Part of the records used in this work were completed by Mr. Kicengge.

The material was collected during study periods and shorter visits in Xinjiang in the course of approximately 10 years (1992–2002). Several important and high quality recordings (approximately 280 minutes of folktales, readings of the *julan* etc.) were made by Mr. Kicengge in the winter of 1995. The collected material contains approximately 70 hours of tape recordings, and approximately 10 hours of digital data.

Most of the material actually used in the description was collected during a study period in Urumchi during 1999–2000. For gathering of the language data I used two methods – writing notes by hand and recording onto tape. The first method proved to be the more suitable for acquiring full paradigms of morphological descriptions. Sometimes writing notes by hand was the only way to take down accounts or expressions which the speakers were for some reasons not willing to have tape-recorded. I also concentrated on fixed expressions, idioms, jokes and other properties of the informal communication. The second method was used for recording longer accounts, the topics of which were chosen in advance according to the interest of the speakers. Often the speaker chose the topic himself based upon what he considered to be important to relate about the Sibes. Most of the recordings concern about history, military matters, shamans, ghosts and spirits and everyday life in the past.

I discussed the paradigms, variants etc. with the speakers after a preliminary classification. The help and support of my informants enabled me to complete some larger units of material for the grammatical description.

In the course of the following description I attempted to choose examples which are either typical for everyday speech, or which show some exceptional features of the spoken language. Whenever it seemed meaningful, I have added notes to the examples, mostly to frame the immediate communication context or morphosyntactical peculiarities of the given example, but sometimes also to provide cultural or historical context. This variance reflects my wish to transmit the live speech material as fully as possible and to avoid potential misunderstandings.

## Notes on the literal translations of examples

Among the many possibilities of morphological glossing I have chosen one of relatively medium specificity. In view of the relatively simple morphological structure of spoken Sibe, I try to gloss the greater part of the morphemes with grammatical meaning and some of the

---

particles with grammatical meaning. Since most of the derivational suffixes are not dealt with in the present work, I do not mark them in the literal translation. Zero suffixes, in view of their great frequency, are glossed only when it is relevant to the grammar in the given explanation. Glossing of particles is slightly more complicated and for several I rather use a fixed lexical translation, which does not vary according to the context. I do the same in the case of some adverbials. This concerns mainly the following expressions:

*o-* (translated as ‘to become’), an existential verb functionally similar to the Mongolian verb *bol-*, used mostly to express identity, with a wide range of usage developed from the basic meaning: ‘to become’, ‘to be possible’, etc.

*gəɮ* (translated as ‘still’), lexical meaning ‘still, also, too; any’,<sup>35</sup> also used in negative constructions as ‘nothing, never, nowhere’, etc.

*su/šu* (translated as ‘ultimately’) is an emphatic particle, which usually designates high degree of quality or high intensity of an action; sometimes it is used in proximity to a superlative.

*dači* (translated as ‘originally’) is an expression used to determine mainly verbs. It is composed of the noun *da* ‘root, base’ etc. and the case suffix *-či*, (ablative in lit. Manchu and lative in Sibe). The meaning of the expression varies between ‘originally’, ‘formerly’ and ‘long ago’.

Another problem was posed by the word *ñi*, which, being originally an enclitic third person possessive pronoun, is also frequently used as a particle for marking the topic, emphasis or foregrounding of the noun which it follows. In some cases it might be appropriate to translate it by a definite article or a demonstrative pronoun (Khalkha Mongolian uses the third-person possessive enclitic pronoun *n*’ in an analogical way). In the literal translation I decided to mark these two functions separately and while the pronoun in its original function is glossed as POSS., in the function of a foregrounding particle or a topic marker it is marked as F.

---

<sup>35</sup> A particle of similar function seems to exist in the entire linguistic sphere of Inner Asia (Mongolian *c*’, Uighur *mu*, Mongghul *da*, Mandarin Chinese *ye*, Tibetan *yang* etc.). In Manchu the word *geli* is apparently a more recently grammaticalized expression).

---

# 1 CHARACTERISTICS OF SPOKEN SIBE

This chapter contains more general information, which is important for the understanding of the detailed explanations that follow. It concerns phonetics, phonology, the lexicon and the definition of the parts of speech.

## 1.1 Notes on the phonetics and phonology

### 1.1.1 Problems of the phonological description of Sibe

The phonetic and phonological structure of spoken Sibe has been the subject of relatively little research. The greatest obstacle to clarifying the Sibe phonemic system in a way that would encompass the overall present situation is the great variance among groups of speakers and the fluidity in the pronunciation of the spoken language. The problems concern above all the distribution of allophones, which significantly differs in dependence on the age of the speakers, and, to some extent, on their adherence to one or another dialectal group.

The local variants of Tarbagatai, Nilqa, Gongliu and Ice Gašan are marked mostly on the levels of prosody, syntax and vocabulary. They concern mostly the older generation, because among the middle-aged and young speakers the knowledge of the Sibe language is considerably less frequent than in Chabchal.

Concerning the age of the speakers, the situation is more complicated and applies more to phonetics. Despite the fact that the language is currently undergoing changes and despite the variability of the mentioned idiolects, it is possible to define roughly two major varieties of spoken Sibe, which are considered to be correct by the speakers while differing from each other. Their origin is closely connected with the the cessation of the use of the Manchu script. Knowledge of written Manchu prevails among speakers born roughly before 1955.<sup>1</sup> Among younger speakers, who grew up during the time when teaching and using Manchu script was forbidden, the number of those who can use it for recording of their own language is around a hundred people. (Kicengge, personal communication 2012)

The overall impression given by the present situation is that the spread of literacy constrained the natural tendencies in the development of the language, and the later loss

---

<sup>1</sup> The relatively high level of literacy (compared to the contemporary Manchu speakers) is a result of educational reform that took place among the Jungarian Sibes during the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.