

How Do Languages Enter Process of Language Death? Evaluations on Qumandy Turkic Language*

Figen Guner Dilek

Gazi University, Turkey

Abstract: The subject of our paper is Qumandy Turks, who live in Southern Siberia region, in the Altai Republic (Gorno-Altaysk) and outside the region, in various aimaqs in Altai Krai and the language of Qumandy Turks who live in the city of Biysk. According to Unesco, Qumandy Turkic language, which is categorized among languages about to become extinct and evaluated as a language about to be almost extinct in the ‘languages under risk’ list, is evaluated within the scope of North Altai dialects in terms of language characteristics and carries common aspects with Shor, Khakas and Chulym Turkic languages. Qumandy texts which have been compiled by Baskakov in 1972 and Güner Dilek (2005) in 1998, comprise the sources of our study. In these texts, which have been compiled at different dates, the issues of the conditions and signs of how Qumandy Turkic entered the stage of ‘languages at risk’

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through the observations the researcher compiled from the texts and the observations the researcher has made in the field and it will be handled in phonetical, morphological, syntactic, lexical and similiar terms. As a result, in this study, on the basis of the mentioned texts, the changes arising in the different levels of the Qumandies' native language are either to be given as examples of new formations or the process of loss triggered by the abandoning of the old due to the new formations.

Keywords: language death, Qumandy Turkic language, Qumandy, Siberia.

Qumandy Turks, who define themselves as *Kuvandı//Kuvanta*, *Kuvandık//Kuvandığ//Kuvandıx* (Satlayev, 2002, 108); *Qumandı*, *Qumundi*, *Qubandı*, *Quwandı*, *Kuwandı*, *Kuvandık*, *Gomandı*, *Gubandı*, *Gumanda*, *Gumandı*, *Guwandı*, *Qıwanda* (Güner Dilek, 2005), live within South Siberia region in Altai Republic (Gorno-Altaysk) and outside this area, in various aimags in Altai Krai and densely in Biysk city. Since they are settled in different areas dispersedly, it is stated that they are registered as Southern Altai in certain regions. This situation makes difficult to find of their real number. According to the population census in 2002 in the UNESCO records, the Qumandy population has been estimated as 1044.¹

Furthermore, the Altai who are generally divided into two groups as south and north have been classified in accordance to their physical attributes in literature for a certain period and the ones in the south have

¹ <http://www.unesco.org/culture/languages-atlas/en/atlasmap/language-id-500.html> (17.11.2012)

been referred to as Kalmuk and the ones in the south, including Qumandies have been referred to as Tatar (Potapov, 1964, 305).

According to UNESCO, Qumandy Turkic languages which has been placed among ‘languages about to be extinct’ and evaluated as being under serious risk² in the ‘languages under risk’ list, is among the North Altai dialects in terms of its linguistic characteristics. Qumandy Turkic language, which shows similar characteristics with Shor, Khakas and Chulym Turkic languages, does not have a written language.

The Qumandy language has been under the influence of Mongolian and Russian languages, as it is the case in all communities located in the Siberian region. It is also claimed that there is a Samoyedic and Ugric peoples influence in the lower layer of Qumandy Turkic languages as well (Pustagaçev, 1997, 302-303; Tambotsev, 2002, 64). In addition, in the studies conducted in this area it has been stressed underline that in Altai Turkic language, the linguistic characteristics of Old Turkic have been preserved more in the vocabulary of Northern Altai dialects, which contain Qumandy Turkic language as well (Pustagaçev, 1997, 304).

Language death is the process, in which the live language is lost or is made to be lost due to the confrontation of the dominant power and passive community displaying a negative attitude towards the passive, especially in communities where a lot of small groups are together (Güner Dilek, (2006) 2007, 707).

Although they differ greatly in line with the factors and the levels of devastation these factors leave on the language, the causes

² <http://www.unesco.org/culture/languages-atlas/en/atlasmap/language-id-500.html> (17.11.2012)

which initiate and maintain the death of a language in a given community have been examined in details in many studies. Among these the decrease in the number of natural speakers, migrations and mandatory or voluntary adoption of another language take the first places (Nettle-Romaine, (2001) 2002, 152-164; Crystal, (2005) 2007, 90-110; Karabulut, 2004, 72-80; Karabulut, 2005, 19-21; Killi Yılmaz, 2010, 65-67).

Many factors have been effective at different levels in leading the Qumandy language to verge the threshold of death. Although they do not have a dense population, the decrease in the number of natural speakers is not a sufficient reason by itself; it should be taken into consideration that, this language community lives in the situation in which it has been dispersed and fused within other linguistic communities. The beginning of the process of the language death takes places with the meeting of at least two languages. In this respect, the Qumandy's language has been under the influence of Mongolian and Russian at most as it is the case in all other communities which are located in the Siberian region. However, not only the native speakers of Russian as guessed, but also the speakers of Khakas, Shor and Altai standard language types, who have at least as active regional and linguistic interaction as them have an effective role in the entrance of the losing process of the Qumandies' mother tongue. All this linguistic variety changes and ruins the texture, which can produce a homogenous and healthy language. Therefore, the insufficiency of the 'co-existence' requirement, which is a significant component for a language to maintain it's liveliness and it's transfer, paves the way for a language to be lost. In other words, the production of multi-part sub linguistic unions from a

language unity endangers a language and easily causes its death (Karabulut, 2004, 73).

A language's change is a global, expected, familiar and inevitable process (Crystal, 2008, 266-267); however, the changes of those languages whose texture has been defected and a language which continues to develop on the base of a healthy texture evolve at different directions. In this light of this information, when we take a look at the Qumandy sub-dialect especially the changes of location through time, the pressure of the dominant language and culture and the mother tongue losing its prestige in the minds of the speakers are significant variables in the endangering of the language.

This article deals with the spoiling effect of an especially neighboring and relative culture, which does not have a very healthy and homogenous structure quality, on another dialect's characteristic in a natural and subdued manner. Russian, which is the dominant language that belongs to a different language family, is already an aspect which reduces the Qumandy's usage of the language. When the pressure of other languages which have a root and culture association is added on top of this, the Qumandy dialect's 'unique' characteristics have started to change and thus, as it began to lose the aspects which allowed it to 'be a separate language union', it has taken a part in a two-ended-death-process.

In this article, the indications of the entry of from Qumandy Turkic language the process of 'endangered languages' in the view of texts compiled from the Qumandy Turkic language in different periods will be shown through phonetical, morphological and lexical examples.

The examples in our study have been taken from Baskakov (1972) and Güner Dilek (2005) Qumandy texts.

Although the structures which have gone through different phonetical developments in different dialects are being used together they come from the same root in the Qumandy dialect, the findings which appeared as a result of the loss of characteristic in terms of ‘replacing the characteristic aspect with the one in the relative by time’ can be exemplified as follows:

Qumandy Turkic language is a Turkic language in terms of the /ɨg, ɨg/ sound group among the /y/ language and dialects and used at the end of polysyllabic words, which is placed under the /-ɨg/ (taɣlıg) group (Tekin 2005). While the /g/ consonant has been expected to be preserved under this condition, today in the concurrent plane, it has been observed that these sounds have been turning into or have turned into long vowels and displayed multiforms in accordance to this transformation process in texts and speech, with the accelerating effect of the Southern Altai dialect ‘Altay Kiji’ dialect on which the standard language type is based upon:

dağ//tağ//dak//daq//tak(<tağ) ‘mountain’ (St. Alt. tuu), *suğ//suw//süw//sü//suu//suuh//súğ// süuk//* (<sug) ‘water, river’ (St. Alt. suu), *uk//ux//uğ//uw//uu* (<uğ) ‘house’ (St. Alt. üy), *aayuu* ‘bear’ (<ayıg<adıg), *aagıra//aarı* (<agrıg) ‘patient’ (St. Alt. ooru), *kışu///ğışuu* (<kiçig) ‘little’ (St. Alt. kiçüü), *çılıw* (<yılıg) ‘hot, warm’ (St. Alt. cıluu), *saryuu* (<sarı yag) ‘butter’ (St. Alt. sarcuu), *uluq//uluu(<ulug)* ‘great, almighty’ (St. Alt. uluu), *äliüü* (<elig) ‘fifty’ (St. Alt. bejen).

In the same manner, we see that the rule of transformation of /g, ğ, v, w, ñ, y.../ sounds, which remain especially between two vowels, or

next to a vowel and defined as characteristic in standard Altai Turkic language, into secondary long vowels has started to take effect in the Qumandy Turkic language as well, sometimes even in examples which have not transformed into long vowels in the standard type:

aar (<*agır*) (St. Alt. *uur*) ‘power’, *araa* (<**aragı*<*araki*) ‘alcoholic drink’ (St. Alt. *araki*), *garraan* (<*gargan*<*kargan*<*karıgan*) ‘old’ (St. Alt. *kargan*), *ġaar-//qaar-//koor-* (<*kagur-*) ‘to fry, to roast’ (St. Alt. *koor-*) , *çağ//çaw* (<*yagı*) ‘war’ (St. Alt. *cuu*), *çulış-* (<*çigılış-*<*yıgılış-*) ‘to gather, to crowd together’, *uula-* (<*ıgla-*) ‘to cry’ (St. Alt. *ıyla-*), *çüür-* (<*cügür-*) ‘to run’.

In the Northern group dialects, a complex and unstable appearance in words draws the attention, for which consonant changes are expected and which ‘identify the characteristic’ in the Qumandy Turkic language, which have started with the Baskakov texts and have become dense in the recent period texts.

In the Qumandy dialect, while the /ç/ sounds were expected to transform into /ş/ sounds through spirantisation in both diachronic and synchronic plane, a complication arisen from the standard type has occurred:

şıġar- ‘take out’ (St. Alt. *çıkar-*), *çıġ-* ‘to go out’ (St. Alt. *çık-*); *üüş//üç* ‘three’ (St. Alt. *üç*), *kışu//kışıw//kıcıw//kıcıw* (<*kiçig*) ‘little’ (St. Alt. *kiçüü*), *ġuuşın* ‘speech; story’ (St. Alt. *kuuçın*), *kuuçında-* ‘to speak’ (St. Alt. *kuuçında-*).

The transformation of /y-/ sound at the beginning of words into /ç-/ sound is a sound characteristic of the Qumandy dialect: *çıl* ‘year’ (<*yıl*), *çer* (<*yer*) ‘motherland’, *çoq* (<*yok*) ‘nothing/no’, *çıġılıj-* (<*yıgılış-*) ‘to come together’. Similarly, the /y-(-n-/-ñ-)> ñ-

transformation is also one of the most distinct sound changes: *ńanı* (<*yañı*) ‘new’, *ńemen//ńaman* (<*yaman*) ‘bad, evil’, *ńian* (<*ńaan*<*yagan*) ‘great/big’ etc.

Along with the expected /y-/>/ç-/ change, the examples of *yırı-* (<(y)*ıra-*) ‘to be far away’, *yıl* ‘year’, ‘nice, beautiful’ with /y-/ under the influence of the Southern Altai dialects and examples of *cañmır* ‘rain’, *caqşı* ‘nice, beautiful’ with /c-/ under the influence of the standard language type exist together.

When we take a look at the case suffixes of the Qumandy Turkic dialect spoken today in terms of some morphological characteristics, we see that forms unique to southern dialects and standard Altai Turkic Language are being used:

Comitative case: In the Qumandy dialect, the suffix in the form of *-bila*, *-bile* has been observed to be preferred to be used in the Baskakov texts frequently as (*balaarı bıla* ‘with one’s children’, *saryuu bile* ‘with butter’, *ağaşdıñ deresibile//deresible* ‘with bark’, although it is used with the spirantised *-wıla* variants as (*adaqdarnıñ aadıwıla* ‘with the name of one’s ancestors’ and that has left its place to standard language type *-la* affix in texts which reflect the current spoken language: *cañmırla* ‘with rain’ *oorusdarla* ‘with the Russians’, *colla* ‘with road’.

Dative case: In the Qumandy dialect, the case marker expected typically and used frequently in the Baskakov texts is the *-saarı/a* suffix, (*ńansaarı* ‘sideways’, *Ulalu saara barganar* ‘They went to Ulalu’ and its variants; however, in the current texts, it has been observed that the shortened forms of this suffix and forms unique to the standard language type *-GA* have been started to be used extensively and that these two

forms are being used intricately: *oñ ninsaa* ‘to the right’, *cirze* ‘to the ground’, *çaarıštañ tooğulsa* ‘from Charish to Toogul’, *ooğrutsa* ‘to the garden’, *dayılğağa* ‘to the victim’, *stolğa* ‘to the table’, *qırğa* ‘to the steppe’, *domskizara//domskise//domskige* ‘to Domski’, *Pissaa aydap keller* ‘Pay a visit to us’.

Ablative case: While the wide vowel variant of the suffix is used extensively in the Baskakov texts, it is noteworthy that the *a/i* interchange, which we frequently come across with in the Chalkans, one of the other dialect of Northern Altai dialects in current texts: *ağımdıñ uluu kiji uldam* ‘My uncle is the person older than my father’, *ağamdıñ kışıwleri açam* ‘My younger uncle is the person younger than my father’, *Men ağımdıñ uğgam*. ‘I have heard it from my father’.

In standard Altai Turkic, when the *-p* converbial suffix is added to verbs ending with the sound */-p/* (*tap-ıp>taap* ‘find out-CV’, the word becomes longer and this is not seen frequently in the Qumandy dialect; however, it has been observed that the native speakers of the Qumandy language in our texts make use of these structures besides other characteristics in the course of natural speech as well, through standard loan: *şaaap* (<*şap-ı-p* <*şap-ı-p*) ‘find out-CV’, *kaabaldı* (<*kap-ı-p aldı*) ‘S/He caught’.

When considered in terms of vocabulary, it is seen that forms in Khakas, Shor, Chalkans Turkic are used together as synonyms, -even within the same speech chain- having standard type, or linguistic contacts besides words that are unique to Qumandy Turkic: In order to give the meaning ‘people’ in the same dialect group with the standard language type, the word *ulus* ‘nation’ is used; whereas in the Qumandy language, this concept is in the form of ‘peoples’ and it has even been

observed that due to the usage of this form, the native speakers of the Qumandy language have produced *ulusdar* belonging to the same nation form *minda ulusdar góp buldı*. ‘there were a lot of people here’. Likewise, it has also been observed that the native speakers use the forms *törtön* and *bejen*, which are the equivalents of the numbers *ğırh* ‘forty’//*älüü* ‘fifty’ in the standard language and just as in the examples given, the verbs *knuçındaş-* (St.Alt.), *çooqdaş-* (Khakas-Shor), *örükdeş-* (Qumandy), quite naturally in the speech chain.

The number of people who speak and write standard Altai Turkic Language and southern dialects are higher than that of Qumandy speakers. As in many communities which are bilingual or multilingual and have left their original settlement areas, the mother tongue has lost its social function in the area of education and communication due to the dominant language Russian being the prestigious language in the Qumandy (Karabulut, 2004/2005). As a result, today’s Qumandy Turkish became a language, which can only be spoken by a certain age group.

As it can also be understood from the examples we have examined in the native language of the Qumandy some grammatical and lexical loan words have been taken from standard Altai Turkic Language with the naturalness brought by structural kinship and this has given way to a change in the language depending on the contamination of other dialect. With this change the Qumandy dialect has lost a great part of its typical characteristics and cause to a sort of death for the language.

We may evaluate the current state of the language in the area through the results obtained through the surveys conducted by a certain number of people by adding our own observations in the following

manner: The native language speakers, who know their mother tongue well and speak fluently are the ones who have been born in the middle of the twentieth century; those born in 1950-1970 partially speak the language and the teenagers and children born after 1970 almost do not speak the language at all. The number of those who refer to themselves as Russian cannot be underestimated.

Those whose native language is Qumandy Turkish and speak and understand the literary Altai language are great in number and many of those people speak 'mixed with standard Altai Turkic language'. The number of those who do not understand and speak since they do not use their mother tongue in communication are also quite high.

In addition, the Qumandy Turks view the dialect they speak differently in comparison with the other Turkish clans, accept it as a separate language and receive state support from different foundations to develop their language. Under the 'communities with small populations' law enacted by the Russian Federation in 1999, the support given to 'communities who still live in areas where their ancestors lived; with a population not exceeding 50.000 and define themselves with a different identity in ethical terms' to help them preserve and develop their languages and cultures, has been very effective in the development in this point of view (Killi Yılmaz, 2010, 135-144).

Consequently, I would like to end the paper stating how native speakers of Qumandy Turkic, whose typical characteristics changed due to the copying and borrowing they have made from different Turkish dialects and sub-dialects, evaluate the state of their mother tongue:

(1) *A bis poylaaris tilde unnabındıbis. Boylaaris çoçoqdaaribis çoq, boylaarısdiñ sarıñnaaribis çoq. Til bojağan, çoq, bistiñ qumandı kiji çoq* (GÜNER DİLEK, 2005 KM-2:254-256). ‘We do not understand our own mother tongue; we do not have our own traditions, songs; language has died and does not exist anymore; we do not have Qumandy people’.

(2) *Men boyımnıñ dilini undıbaadım. Anım ağım uude bisdiñ dilibile örükdeşcatğanır. Ançın boyımnıñ dilini undıbaadım* (GÜNER DİLEK, 2005 KM-3 183-185). ‘I have not forgotten my mother tongue; my mother and father spoke our mother tongue in our house, which is the reason why I have not forgotten it.’

(3) *oolam boynuñ dilibile örükdenminçit, oonnapçit. Oğuna aalıhçıt, a örükdenminçit. Doje oorur arasında ösgen, oorur arasında ürgöngen i oorur şkolda ürgöngen i arğışdaarı oorusdar, añçün* (GÜNER DİLEK, 2005 KM-3 186-191). ‘My son does not speak his mother tongue; he understands it, but cannot speak it. He was raised among the Russians, he is constantly among the Russians in school too; his friends are Russian and he is educated in Russian. That is the reason why he forgot.’

(4) *Ar bolor qumandılarğa, qumandılarğa ar bolor, coğolup barçıdıbis, göp kışiler ölçet, as balar töröpçet, vat birçılğa, bu ortalta altan çetdi kışi üülpaan, üçlü bala döreyin, qumandılar ürepçiler, artğanda çaş balar, quwandılar boynuñ dilni uunabınçılar, mñayla oorustapçılar* (GÜNER DİLEK, 2005, KM-3 192-197) The Qumandy

are in a difficult position; we are becoming extinct. Most of the people die, have less children. In the last one year (1998), an average of 67 people died and only three children were born. The Qumandy race is becoming extinct and it is becoming corrupted. The remaining youth does not understand their mother tongue and thus speak Russian.'

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