
**Revitalization of minority languages: comparative
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Revitalization of minority languages: comparative dictionary of key cultural terms in the languages and dialects of the Shughnani-Rushani group

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1. INTRODUCTION¹

‘Pamiri languages’ serves as the conventional denomination of the languages belonging to the East Iranian branch of the Iranian language family. These languages are located in Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and China. The Shughnani-Rushani language group consists of closely related Pamiri languages: Shughnani, Rushani, Bartangi, Roshorvi, Khufi, and Sarikoli. This language group as well as the closely related Yazghulami language is prevalent in the mountainous badakhshan Autonomous region of the Republic of Tajikistan (with the exception of Sarikoli located in China). Other Pamiri languages, Wakhi; Ishkashimi, Sanglechi, and Zebaki, are sited on the Tajik border with Afghanistan; Wakhi people live also in Pakistan. These vernaculars have no written tradition and are used only as spoken languages in the region. All of them are under the pressure from titular Tajik and are in the situation of language endangerment. In 18th-20th centuries, the Pamiri group included now extinct Old Wanji, Zebaki, and possibly Sarghulami that is known only from I.I. Zarubin in his description of Pamiri languages (1924). Apart from that the social and linguistic situation of these languages is not simple, in particular their linguistic status is still discussed in Iranistics.

These language communities have ceased to speak their mother tongues in public, in favour of the surrounding dominant Tajik language. The languages have now deteriorated: they are spoken only in private, within the community until the native speakers adopt the externally conveyed negative attitude towards them and cease completely to pass the languages on to their children. This process is taking place in Badakhshan, affecting different languages, depending on the number of their speakers and their local status. So, Old Wanji closely related to Shughnani-Rushani group is known just by a dozen recorded words and several phrases written down by Prof. Zarubin and others (1924; Rozenfeld 1964). The Upper Bartang communities were described by I.I. Zarubin at the beginning of the 20th century during his own and mutual expeditions with Prof. R. Gouthiot (1928). He was one of the first researchers who identified the Upper Bartang population with Sarikoli settlers migrated to Hinkiang (Hinjiang, Iranian Shinghon) in China through the Pamir mountains. This happened first approximately several centuries ago and later in 1911 as a result of an earthquake, which destroyed local villages Sarez, Yerxt, Withoy (Usoy), by glacier and landslides, and the emergence of the Sarez lake. This and other migrations changed the traditional location and the whole profile of the speech varieties of this highland isolated valley. Another

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reason for frequent relocations was bad harvest, lack of pastures and fuel in higher parts of Bartang valley, such as Roshorv, Ghudara, Thawnob or Nisur and Bar-Chidif. As a result of the relocations, as well as complex marriage patterns, new language communities decrease or change the dialect base. One community located in the remote and isolated village at the higher end of the side tributary of the Bartang river – Bardara, speaks a distinct language variety. The number of speakers in the village is limited to approximately 180 households; the language is used only within the borders of the community, transmitted from one generation to another in the family. The settlers usually also speak Bartangi (sometimes Roshorvi), Rushani (men also Shughnani) and Tajik – languages of communication with other communities. This language is in danger of extinction; it is among the most ill-described and endangered vernaculars. As it lies in the borderland between Bartangi and Roshorvi, and could be considered as transitional, it is under pressure from both, as well as under social, economic and political pressures from Rushani – the major language of the administrative center – and from Shughnani, the language of the bazaar for Bardara settlers. It is also in danger from Tajik, the official language of the state and school. Along with the local vernacular, cultural activities that are still preserved in the area are threatened and fast disappearing. As soon as electricity will be accessible for the villagers, local traditions, like regular story-telling and by this the transmission of oral tradition, such as legends, riddles, songs of emotional longing, etc. to a younger audience will be lessened and step by step eliminated.

A similar and even more complicated situation could be observed with Sarikoli in China, where the Sarikoli Pamiri language is surrounded not by Iranian languages, but by Turkic Uyghur language and Chinese. As a result of political and economic reasons the language is doomed. Its community has ceased to speak it in public in favour of the surrounding dominant language(s) and culture(s). The mother tongue is used only for contact within the community, especially inside family. As a rule, the status of such speech deteriorates to that of a ‘home language’. Finally, its native speakers adopt the externally conveyed unenthusiastic attitude towards it and cease to pass it on to their children. Such a process is taking place in Badakshan and Sarikol affecting different languages according to the number of their speakers and their local status.

The other possibility in the age of globalization is to witness a reshaping of ethnic identity as well as the (re)emergence of newly constructed nationhood. For instance, Sarikoli speakers traditionally identify themselves as Tajiks (along with Wakhi people also called by the ethnonym Tajik in China) in opposition to the Uyghur and Chinese population. In the situation of shortage of employment and opportunities for education this contraposition could become rather frustrating. Such bi-, multi- and poly-cultural societies today more than ever confront issues generated from self-identification efforts at the grass-root-level. While current political developments exacerbate or neglect such phenomena, pacts of forgetting and other silent alliances that had historically been established are interrogated and challenged by younger generations, as happened in Tajikistan during the Civil War in the 1990s, when South Tajiks and Badakhshanis resisted Russians, Uzbeks and North Tajiks.

The investigation of the Pamiri languages gives the opportunity for further study of the socio-linguistic situation as a factor that is influencing language policy. It helps to elaborate a balanced language policy in respect to the language minorities – Pamiri ethnic groups in Tajikistan. As the basic component of national and language development in Tajikistan is the role of language in interethnic conflict, this fact determines attempts of the society to influence the language and bring attention to the languages of minorities.

The implemented process of data collection has strong interdisciplinary orientation and intends to create opportunities for subsequent multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary utilization of the respective data. The underlying concept of the paper is that through documenting Pamir languages vocabulary data we can ‘provide a comprehensive record of the linguistic practices characteristic of a given speech community’ (Himmelmann 1998: 166); provide a profile of the speech variety of a traditional community through lexical data collected based on some distinctive methods. It also aims to provide a record of the linguistic practices characteristic of a given speech community, in order to document and archive its language practices, and the current situation of its cultural terminology. And through this reliably reconstruct historical and socio-linguistic data of the Pamiri communities.

The Pamiri vernaculars have no systematic linguistic archive. We intend to document it in order to show the community new aspects of their mother tongue, reinforcing their relationships with their language heritage. This raises the value of their native speech variety for the language community; it helps to preserve and revitalize this variety, as well as other mother tongues of Iranian minorities. The project is focused on data collection, with the goal of establishing a data base of cultural terms (in electronic form).

Specifically, the documenting of the Pamiri lexis (words and expressions) enables us to obtain knowledge about the oral tradition and written word, as well as to preserve and revitalize the mother tongues of Pamir minorities.

2. EXISTING DOCUMENTATION

The process of the work was divided into two phases. The initial phase consisted of collecting data gathered in printed materials and archives and preserving them. This first step was to collect all written materials gathered mainly during the second part of the 19th century. The first scholarly descriptions were made by Robert Shaw (Great Britain) (1876, 1877) and D.L. Ivanov (Russia) (1895) and at the beginning of the 20th century by Prof. Zarubin (1924; 1928; 1937; 1960) who later founded a Russian School of Minor Iranian languages that is represented by the research of V.S. Sokolova (1959; 1967), R. Dodykhudoev (1962), D. Karamshoev (1963; 1970; 1988-1999), J. Edelman (1987), and many others. Simultaneously Pamiri languages of Afghanistan and Pakistan for more than 50 years were investigated by Norwegian scholar G. Morgenstierne (1928; 1974).

Though being documented all Pamiri languages up to now have no systematic archive on language documentation. The first phase of data collection

was to collect printed and written materials on the Shughni-Rushani languages. Consequently, the initial phase of our project consists of collecting and recording written data available in academic and university archives (unpublished, difficult-to-access archival materials). Another source of information was language material gathered from different historical documents and written materials in Tajik, Dari and Farsi, which contain lexical data on Pamir languages. All these data were printed and documented. So, for instance, the languages of the Upper Bartang-region were documented for the first time at the beginning of the 20th century by I.I. Zarubin (1928). Later Kh. Kurbanov and N. Karamkhudoev published their books on Roshorvi and Bartangi (1976; 1973). In the second part of the 20th century research on Pamiri languages, in particular Rushani, Roshorvi, Bartangi and Shughnani, was carried out by the British scholar Dr John Payne (1979; 1980), who worked in the Pamirs along with scholars of the Department of the Pamiri Languages of the Institute of Language and Literature at the Tajik Academy of Sciences. We obtained as well three rare narrative texts on oral tradition and folklore from Bardara village collected in 1987 by Nisor Shakarmamadov. These concerned local rites and festivals that were written down by the scholar and preserved in the archive of the Institute of Humanities at Tajik Academy of Sciences (Khorogh).

Sarikoli vernacular was described after R. Shaw by T.N. Pakhalina who approximately one century later gave detailed description with collection of texts and wide-ranged vocabulary on three local speech varieties: Tashqurghan, Wacha and Burungsol (1966; 1971).

3. NEW DOCUMENTATION

The next step was to collect new data in the area of the vernacular's location. In this phase data were collected on the basis of an index of a representative selection of cultural terms. This index was designed for collecting lexical data on a thematically-conceptual basis and consisted of more than twenty subdivisions with approximately 100 entries in each of them. These are: Names; The Physical World; Physical and Spiritual Features; Mankind. Body Parts, Functions, and Conditions; Flora; Fauna; Food; Drink; Cooking and Utensils; Clothing; Textiles; Jewelry; Personal Adornment; Hygiene and Care; Dwelling, house; House design; Household; Holy Places and Places of Pilgrimage; Agriculture; Vegetation; Crafts; Instruments; Number; Quantity; Property; Commerce; Spatial Relations: Place Form, Size. Time; Sense Perception; Emotion; Mind; Thought; Vocal Utterance, Speech; Political Divisions and Social Relations; Kin Terms (term and term of address); Law and Traditional Science; Warfare; Religion; Demonology; Superstition; Verbs: Motion. Physical Acts, etc.

This index of a representative selection of cultural terms database was trialed during several field work sessions in different parts of Badakhshan. The data (in the form of small texts, phrases, and words) were first recorded, and then deciphered and after processing the collected field materials were transcribed in

written electronic form in International Iranian transcription (Edelman 1964) and placed in electronic form as a spreadsheet.

The form for each lexical unit is organised as an electronic data base where all six Shughnani-Rushani language forms are presented. The main form is Shughnani in four speech varieties: Shughnani proper, Shahdara, Bajuwi, and Barwozi; Rushani and Khufi, both in two vernaculars: Upper and Lower; Bartangi with local dialects of Basid, Rawmed, Siponj; Roshorvi with microdialects of Ghudara, Bar-Chidif and Nisur; and Sarikoli with Tashkurgan, Wacha, Burungsol variants. These data are given in parallel with the examples from Tajik literary language and/ or Tajik South-Eastern dialects that neighbour Pamir languages. The commentary occasionally includes 'transitional' vernaculars. These lexical forms are given along with Russian translation or explanation, usage examples and their Russian translations, information on original sources of the word (in case there are written sources, archives, etc.). Each item has commentary that includes lexical synonyms; comparative, historical and etymological commentary, where the form links (if known) with ancient, medieval East- and West-Iranian languages, shows the historical dynamics of the East-West Iranian influence; parallels with lexicographic data of the contemporary Tajik dialects and literary language. Also given are socio-linguistic and ethno-cultural commentaries; descriptive and explanatory remarks on contexts and usage.

As the verb in the Shughnani-Rushani group is a distinctive part of the vocabulary the form for verbs is different from the form for nominatives; it is supposed to be of a design suitable for tenses and gender systems, all personal, singular and plural forms, as well as different types of roots and stems (transitive/intransitive, regular/irregular). The verb system, especially stems, is rather archaic and displays models inherited from ancient Iranian idioms. A special form serves for displaying the structure of the system of Present stems in the Shughnani-Rushani group, tracing back to Iranian present stem system (worked out on the Old Persian and Avesta languages stems systems, with the regard to Old Indian materials, and traced back to the Indo-European present stem system).

It is worth mentioning that in dealing with endangered languages it is more important than in other cases to extend the aims of the research beyond the limits of linguistics and to study also the area of ethnology, cultural anthropology and other related disciplines. So, our data for documenting language use combine linguistic and socio-linguistic profile, as well as a portrait of cultural practices and traditions through the lexical data base. For this reason the extra-linguistic data, such as ethnic, demographic, cultural, and historical information are so important. And it is intended that the data collection should encompass linguistic phenomena as part of an extensive cultural and social complex. As culture becomes part of a person's verbal behaviour it modifies the way of thinking and relating to other members of the society and environment. By collecting data on these processes we preserve the cultural history of the community.

From the other side, a comparative multilingual dictionary of a group of closely related languages reflects different processes that take place in the language group, and also reflects the usage of each language. Having in mind the

mechanisms by which culture influences the language and environment, linguistic data are collected along with extra-linguistic. In this way, an outline of the social and historic situation of the language and its language community can emerge.

The basis for the data base of the Shughnani-Rushani key cultural terms were arranged by index and catalog. The data base was processed using Microsoft Access, with structured data on language materials, which allows detailed search of the data. The format for full documentation is an electronic database of the cultural terms in the form of written Iranian transcription and Russian translation, analysis of materials, semantic and grammatical information, with cultural materials and commentary on each lexical entry. Additionally if possible we provide simultaneous images or video materials. Materials include a range of recordings of language usage: words, phrases, everyday conversation, narrative, oratory, ceremonial speech, and verbal art.

This paper is focused on the techniques and strategies used in the process of the field work for the establishing of a multilingual dictionary. One of our specific techniques is verifying language data by ethno-cultural information and environment and vice versa. These correlations reveal the implicit connection of the language data with culture, tradition and world-view and demonstrate the dependence of language on culture and globalization processes. As J.I. Edelman mentions writing about her first years in the Pamirs:

In the process of collecting and analysing data on spiritual culture at first even the way of people's perception of the world was unusual for me. So, in 1950-1960s in Yazghulam valley people did not used hours to specify time. They were using traditional system of ancient daytime distribution, designated by such terms, as 'morning', 'day', 'evening' and 'night' (Edelman 2007).

Many other instances of such divergence in views could be given as examples. We present only one more instance of cultural distinction of the Shughnani-Rushani language group. In these languages spatial orientation is based on the traditional way of designating direction. Therefore, it is focused on the 'up' and 'down' flow of the river, not pointing to south or north, designated by prepositions *pi* 'up' and *ar* 'down' (Dodykhudoev 1975: 61; Yusufbekov 1998: 78).

Discussing the Ismaili Pamiri communities of Badakhshan and Sarikol it is worth mentioning that spiritual and religious information has several layers of accessibility that are usually 'hidden' from the outsider. The spiritual traditions are connected mainly with its inner levels, though expressed on an outer level in verbal form serving as a symbol of inner meaning. This way of coding information is typical in the Iranian world for Sufi orders, professional guilds, etc. and is accepted in the didactic poetry of the patron of Pamiri Ismailism – Nasir Khusraw. Being a missionary he applied rhetorical methods to local tradition and cultural memory of the community and by this introduced distinct creative discursive strategies. One of Nasir Khusraw's strategies is based on the well-known Shiya *taqiya* principle where knowledge is considered a valuable spiritual

resource. This approach gave information high value and importance, attached honoured status and prestige. A poet made his listener feel 'ignorance', or 'deficit of wisdom'. At the same time he stimulated search for information and learning; encouraged striving for knowledge; taught that only a teacher can open 'the veil of wisdom'; giving instructions in understanding of the text can help to become chosen, privileged. One more strategy was the use of a particular word for linking with cultural context as an 'associating bridge' (Dodykhudoeva, Reisner 2007: 181-182). Nasir succeeded in implementation of an original world view and distinct symbolic language that took root from the 11th century and is still popular in the region.

In the majority of verbal practices of the population of Badakhshan we can see discursive strategies introduced by Nasir and inherited by his pupils. Here are the roots of some traditional language skills and ways of verbal communication structure. For instance, the thesis that information produced by elderly speakers is culturally much more profound than by young ones. This position is supported not only by the general logic that an experienced person is more competent, but also by the authority status of the elder in the traditional Pamiri community. This could be proved by the very term *pīr*, lit. 'old, elder', as this is the same term that is used in Sufi orders to designate the Master of the commune. On a regular basis elders function as teachers and instructors. Even talking with 'elder' or 'right' person in everyday situations has more value and significance in the eyes of community members. For that reason, during our visit to Sarikol this year we met a man who worked as language consultant with T.N. Pakhalina in 1950s and was rather displeased to find that we were working with younger, 'less proficient', from his point of view, language experts.

In the above mentioned article J.I. Edelman points out that main sources of information in the field are: 1) answers to questions; 2) spontaneous narrative (monologue), conversation (dialogue); 3) folklore text; and 4) language of rituals (2007). Here, the first two modes could be identified as spontaneous verbal production and the last two as texts predetermined by oral tradition. These modes of information differ in traditional society not only by means of speech production, but also by the attitude to the role of the speaker and his words both from his own part and from his audience. The last two styles have much higher prestige and status in the eyes of the speaker and listener. These words get the rank (sometimes unconsciously) of the speech that is consecrated by tradition and could not be changed, even in details. In this situation even a slight change of words can involve problems. So, in the process of writing down the text after audio recording, a language expert insists that everything should be 'correct' (he wants the 'right' word or phrase to be written or even re-recorded). However, occasionally, data that were recorded with the help of the expert himself are not consistent with this view.

Traditional methods of field linguistics: questionnaires, interviews, tests, observation; experimenting with informants, in the Russian school of field linguistics are combined with socialization of the researchers in the language community. This includes collecting and recording language materials while living at the site for a long period, living in the local family, observation of habits

and verbal mode of the community, as well as a broad set of specific data collection techniques. This strategy supposes mastering of the language competency as well as long work among the community. This also presumes: keeping away from second (intermediary) language; strive to direct dialogue with monolingual speaker; contact with elderly or different age group speakers. Through these, nearly all means that are used during short stay, such as: preliminary tests, questionnaires and interviews of the informants for identification of their language competence are made in the process of observation and spontaneous communication. In our particular work, we use specific ethno-linguistic and cultural methods. We elaborated different types of questionnaires and experts interviews with ethno-linguistic focus for onomastics, ethnic and religious self-identification, perception of the landscape and space and time orientation. We make use of socio-linguistic focal points for intercommunity relations, religious interrelations between different neighbour communities (Sunni, Shiya, Russian Orthodox) and for specific minor and professional groups, such as craftsmen: *kuloli* ‘potters’, women working in the pastures *-yel*, herdsmen, etc., as well as women in the family and traditional household. We especially highlight psycho-linguistic aspects that included information on colour and size perception in different communities, and specificity of Shughnani-Rushani Deixis system. We also use different types of field experiments to get phonetic data.

Another important issue for data collection in closed societies is the willingness of the community members to share information with scholars. In the process of collecting data both native and external researchers have advantages and weaknesses. The first one as a bearer of local culture should be properly trained in linguistics and then can deepen his knowledge by observation and talking to elders. The second – ‘outsider’ – needs extended language and cultural competence and time for adaptation as well as contacts with native settlers (usually bilingual persons) and their confidence. As was mentioned by J.I. Edelman, at the beginning the whole world interpretation was ‘unusual’ for the researcher. After working on minor Iranian languages for more than 60 years the scholar got a perfect understanding of the local world view, insight of the self, humankind and environment.

In both cases the best way is collaboration of the researcher with the community as a whole and its particular representatives. This could start from the mutual origin, nationhood, citizenship, religion or interests; and further result in elaboration of steady friendly relationships based on trust, as not only researchers observe community, but the community also observes the scholars. So, up to now one can hear in remote villages of Roshorv and Upper Khuf legendary accounts of the expeditions of I.I. Zarubin and M.S. Andreev in the first part of the 20th century with some remarks on their behaviour according to the local code of honour.

I offer a short profile of professional skills of a field linguist. A team consisting of several scholars working on one or similar techniques with diverse cultural backgrounds (native and worldwide) is the most appropriate. This type of team structure allows taking into consideration most of the cultural aspects and collect data in most productive way.

For instance, a specific strategy is employed when a researcher taking part in a social gathering and observing verbal communication of the participants ‘uses the situation’ and gently without others being concerned puts his own questions. A non-regular ‘question-answer’ dialogue strategy could be used if a scholar himself observes a meeting, but involves a mediator – usually a local discussant, who puts ‘stupid’ or ‘enthusiastic’ questions or adds extras by giving remarks on the story thereby ‘showing himself up’, directing by this means the conversational theme and provoking answers (Skyhawk 2003; Edelman 2007)).

To date, our team (myself, Shodikhon Yusufbekov, and Vladimir Ivanov, who joined the latest project) had sessions in Sarikol and several field sessions in Upper Bartang. Members of the team established close contacts with the language community, and have permanent contacts through teachers, students and school children. The leader of the Upper Bartang region approved the research and supported accommodation, coaching and helping with different problems, such as recharging batteries in absence of electrical power and helping to purchase gasoline. During the 2006-2007 field sessions the team worked in collaboration with participants from the language community, especially school children and teachers, and many local people were involved. People were rather friendly and interested in the research on their local vernaculars; they helped us to deal with our cameras, recorders and computers and were eager to be involved in the process of making pictures, helping us to choose sites and interesting landscapes, objects and artifacts for shooting. People were most willing to tell us the history of the localities and interested in making new contacts.

The pilot trip to Bardara in July 2007 allowed us to get in contact with the community elders and to obtain their interest and approval of our work in, and with, the community. We also obtained responsive and effective cooperation with members of Bardara community as a whole, especially children. During our team’s project held in Bardara, the community was fully cooperative. People were proud to talk about their village, its history and willingly helped in collecting their mother tongue materials. Our work on a dictionary of key cultural terms was popular among language consultants. Local people were eager to tell about their culture as much as they know, and to share their traditional knowledge.

In turn we shared with the local community our knowledge of their history and culture, and thus provided them with the feeling that knowledge about this community and its culture is important for the outside world. We shared with members of the community outcomes of the research, especially in the form of still images and video materials. In future we plan teamwork in a local summer camp on local speech and children’s familiarization with our key terms in Tajik, Russian and English.

With the development of modern audio and video technologies we employed in our work new techniques that help to collect more information of various types and to get it quicker. So, we engaged a method elaborated by V.B. Ivanov, implemented while teaching Persian language in Moscow State University and in field work among Zoroastrian minorities of Iran (2007: 52). The method allows stimulation of speech by demonstrating to a language consultant a series of visual

images in the printed form. This gives the language consultant an opportunity to start a spontaneous description of the situation depicted in the picture and to provide a text (short or long) as a result. It avoids using a mediator language (Tajik, Persian; Shughnani or Rushani) in communication with the language consultant. This procedure was engaged during several field sessions while working with students of Khorogh State University (who came to study from various parts of Badakhshan) for recording data on Shughnani-Rushani phonetics, and in Rushan and Bartang regions with different age and gender groups in 2006-2007. The data were recorded on digital recorder, transcribed by researchers together with speakers in the field and analysed later.

Until now, there has been no digitally recorded data on the Pamiri vernaculars that would permit systemic analysis using modern computerized technology. There has been no reliable digital audio record of the vocal or even grammar system of languages. Our preliminary results demonstrate more accurate data on phonetics (in comparison with data of previous research (Faizov 1966; Karamkhudoev 1973; Edelman 1987)). The recordings were made on a notebook in an office of the University building with relatively low background noise. To further improve the signal / noise ratio we used AKG 420C head mounted microphones. Raw recordings were edited using Adobe Audition 2.0 and Adobe Soundbooth CS3. Segmentation and acoustical analysis were done using Praat.

We can consider our records as a preliminary results. These demonstrate that digital records made in 2006 and 2007 of Shughnani, Rushani and Bartangi numerals display shift in comparison with previous data. So, in the case of Shughnani-Rushani *īw* 'one' the prothetic *y-* is absent in all Rushani and Bartangi examples, and in part of Shughnani. Traditional for the whole Shughnani-Rushani group, *pīn3*, Sarikoli *pin3* 'five' is recorded as *pīnc*, *pinc*. Rushani *wūvd* 'seven'; in the pronunciation of our speakers in half of the cases lost final *-d*, *waxǎ* 'eight' in all cases lost last *-t*. In the case of Rushani *δos* 'ten' in the pronunciation of two of our speakers we have additional final *-t*: *δost* (Ivanov 2007).

The recorded digital data we obtained allow us to assemble an archive of audio language materials. On this basis, we identify the main vocabulary of each vernacular, and produce a comparative dictionary that allows further investigation of the phonetic system, grammar and lexis of the language.

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