

Dahlem Lectures in Linguistics

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Continuity and change in Dukhan, a Turkic language of northern Mongolia

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The Dukhan people are a Turkic-speaking nomadic group inhabiting the northernmost regions of Mongolia's Khövsgöl region. Dukhan is nowadays actively spoken by ca. 500 people: around 32 families are reindeer herders in the surrounding taiga areas, whereas the remaining families have settled down in the village of Tsagaan Nuur and in neighbouring low-land areas.

Dukhan is a non-written language. It represents the "in-group" language and is spoken in a narrow family circle. On the other hand, the language that serves for all spheres of communication is Darkhat-Mongolian, an Oirat Mongolian variety with some Buryat features and a strong Turkic substrate. Linguistically Dukhan belongs to the Taiga subgroup of Sayan Turkic, a subbranch of Siberian Turkic. Dukhan shows interesting cases of retention of ancient Turkic features besides several innovations due to language contact phenomena. The present paper will discuss some of such features.