

INTRODUCTION

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Altaic studies in Poland

Considering the vastness of the north-eastern part of Eurasia, this area is linguistically rather homogenous. Extraneous languages (e.g. Russian) put aside, most widely spread are here Turkic languages as well as similar to them in many ways Mongolic and Tungus languages.¹ Similarities between them are so obvious that scholars adopted one name of an Altaic group to categorize them into. It is still, however, an open matter whether it is a family or a league of languages.

Scholars who deal with Turkic languages are Turkologists, Mongolic – Mongolists and Tungus – Tungusologists, some of whom are also Manchurists. However, these specialties often do not come “uncontaminated:” one and the same scholar may research a Turkic language or a Mongolic one or both at the same time, attempting to explain relations between them. Such scholars are actually Altaists.

Altaic studies understood as a field of knowledge dealing with Turkic, Mongolic and Tungus languages and with relations between them have a long and interesting history. The development was different in various countries: in those with old ties with Asia Altaic studies were born earlier, in others they came late; in some scholars specialized in one or another topic. Altaic studies in Poland have also had their specific character. And that is what this article is about.

Let us start with Turkology. From the point of view of Polish scholars Turkic peoples can be divided into:

- a) Turkic peoples who used to be neighbours of Poles for an extensive period of time, among them Pechenegs, Kipchaks – Cumans, Crimean Tatars and Ottoman Turks.
- b) Peoples living in Poland for a long time: Karaites and – today completely assimilated – Polish (Lithuanian) Tatars. To this group belong also Armenians of Lviv, who up till the 17th century spoke Kipchak language.

¹ In the newest literature these languages have been called by different names: for Russian authors they are Tungus-Manchu (тунгусо-маньчжурские языки), and for the Anglo-Saxons they are Manchu-Tungus languages or Tungus languages. The latter name, being easiest to use, has been adopted in the present article.

- c) Peoples with whom before the 20th century Poland had only occasional contact (Yakuts, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz...) or no contact at all (Old Turks / Göktürks).

For a long time Polish scholars were interested in the first group. Contacts with them, often turbulent, were an incessant source of troubles which required negotiations and these were not possible without people acting as interpreters.² It was then that the first “study aids” like grammar books and dictionaries were written (Meninski 1680–1687). On the other hand, due to these peoples being neighbours of Poland for a long time today, there exist in the country quite many Turkic historical objects, including written documents. Researching those has become the tradition of Polish Turkology. It is for a reason that a huge part of its legacy constitute works on history of art and publications of source texts.

But we shall not deal with those here. Assuming that what links Altaic peoples are features of their languages, we will take a look at linguistic works only. Their authors were interested in the following fields:

1. Ottoman and modern Turkish languages as well as their local variants. Any Polish student interested in these can refer to manuals (Szapszał S. 1931, Borzęcka M., Majda T. 1965), dictionaries (e.g. Antonowicz-Bauer L., Dubiński A. 1983, Kozłowska M. 2009), grammar books (Majda T. 2001, Stachowski M. 2009), phrasebooks (Jankowski H. 1983, Antonowicz-Bauer L. 1985, Chmielowska D., Kılıç A. 2003) and texts for reading (Majda T., Hensel W. 1975, 1982). We should also mention here the monograph on the old Ottoman language (Majda T. 1985) and works of T. Kowalski on Turkish dialects of Anatolia (Kowalski T. 1936, 1937).
2. Dialects of the Karaite language. Due to the fact that a small Karaite community (from which, by the way, came several outstanding Turkologists) lives in Poland, there are quite many Polish works on these dialects (cf. e.g. Szapszał S. 1928, Kowalski T. 1929, Zajączkowski A. 1931, 1961, Dubiński A. 1994, Németh M. 2003).
3. Armenian-Kipchak language – Edward Tryjarski is an outstanding expert on this subject (cf. e.g. Tryjarski E. 1968–1972, 1989).
4. Yakut language. There is a very peculiar approach to Yakut studies in Poland because among pioneers in the field are Polish exiles worshipped as freedom fighters. Most well-known are Waław Sieroszewski – author of the famous work *Dwanaście lat w kraju Jakutów* [*Twelve Years in the Country of the Yakuts*] (Sieroszewski W. 1900) and Edward Piekarski, whose enormous thirteen-volume Yakut dictionary is of lasting value (Piekarski E. 1907–1930). Thus Poland has both traditions and materials necessary to study Yakut because the exiles brought some of them to the motherland. Among contemporary Polish experts on this language we should mention

² Those must have existed already in the 16th century. According to M. Strykowski, in 1501 Krzysztof Teslik and Michał Halecki, “both experts in Tatar language” were sent to the Orda (Strykowski M. 1978. *O początkach, wywodach, dzielnościach, sprawach rycerskich i domowych sławnego narodu litewskiego, żemojdzkiego i ruskiego, przedtem nigdy od żadnego ani kuszone, ani opisane, z natchnienia Bożego a uprzejmie pilnego doświadczenia* [*On the origins, genealogy, bravery, knighthood and housekeeping of the famed Lithuanian, Samogitian and Ruthenian nations*], p. 564).

late Stanisław Kałużyński and Marek Stachowski. The former published a number of works on the language and culture of the Yakuts, subsequently collected as *Iacutica* (Kałużyński S. 1995). The other scholar, M. Stachowski deals mainly with Dolgan language, akin to Yakut (Stachowski M. 1993, 1995, 1997, 1998, 1999).

5. Language of the Orkhon monuments. Previously mentioned E. Tryjarski is among contemporary scholars interested in it (Tryjarski E. 1972, 1976). It should be added that one of the Orkhon inscriptions was discovered by a Polish Mongolist W. Kotwicz (see below).
6. Miscellanea. In Poland there are also publications on Kazakh (e.g. Łabenda M. 2000), Gagauz (Zajączkowski W. 1966), Chuvash (Parzymies A. 2000), Proto-Bulgar (Parzymies A. 1991) and other languages.

As was already mentioned, in Poland the impulse for Turkic studies came from relations with Turkic speaking neighbours. These relations were frequently complicated, often hostile, creating problems insolvable without the knowledge of the language. It was different with Mongolian studies. Yes, there was a moment in Poland's history (13th century) when Mongolian state was a neighbour but that time's acquaintance with the Mongols was short. Even though medieval envoys who visited the khan – among them Benedict of Poland – gathered plenty of information about the Mongols,³ for a common citizen of Poland its value was minor not only was it known only to a chosen few, it also quickly became obsolete. Mongols of the Golden Horde with whom Poles had contacts quickly assimilated with the Kipchaks.

There was no other direct contact between the Poles and the Mongols until the 18th-19th centuries.⁴ And also that time it was caused by a compilation of political events, however different. Russia, stretching in the east all the way to the Pacific, in the west conquered a part of Poland and tsar's court appreciating intellectual potential of the Poles did all to use it for its goals. Lives of three people certify that.

Count Jan Potocki (1761–1815) was an outstanding representative of the Polish Enlightenment; writer, traveler and scholar of Eastern Europe's antiquity. In 1805 he became the head of a group of scholars in the Russian legation sent to China. Unfortunately, due to disagreements with the Chinese they reached only as far as Urga. Potocki did not manage to begin any research, however he became the first Pole to visit Mongolia as a scholar. And that is why he should be remembered.⁵

³ We are talking about envoys sent by Pope Innocent IV in 1245 to the khan of the Mongols. For more information see Strzelczyk J. 1993. *Spotkanie dwóch światów. Stolica Apostolska a świat mongolski w połowie XIII wieku* [Meeting of Two Worlds. The Holy See and the Mongol World in mid-13th Century]. Poznań 1993, Wydawnictwo ABOS. You will also find there translation of the Polish envoys' report.

⁴ What is meant here are direct contacts. Indirect ones did exist and although hard to trace can be found in literature. It is interesting that e.g. the first notion of the Kalmyks in Polish sources can be found already in 1499; see Tulisow J. 2013. *Mongolia i Mongołowie w literaturze staropolskiej* [Mongolia and the Mongols in the Old Polish Literature], p. 137.

⁵ More on that in W. Kotwicz W. 1935. *Jan hr. Potocki i jego podróż do Chin* [Count Jan Potocki and His Journey to China], pp. 54–76.

Józef Kowalewski (1800–1878): in his youth he studied classical languages in Vilnius but later, due to his involvement with secret students' associations, was exiled to Kazan. There, as requested by authorities he began to study eastern languages, especially then poorly known Mongolian. To deepen his knowledge he traveled to Transbaikal inhabited by the Buryats, and then to Mongolia and China. He returned to Kazan as a respected expert in his field and in 1834 he took charge of the world's first chair of Mongolian studies at the university there. Towards the end of his life he moved to Warsaw. He authored a number of valuable works including a chrestomathy of Mongolian language (Kowalewski J. 1836, 1837), grammar book of that language (Kowalewski J. 1835) and a three-volume Mongolian-Russian-French dictionary, extremely useful to this day (Kowalewski J. 1844–1849).⁶

The third person we need to mention here – Władysław Kotwicz (1872–1944) – was the first Polish Mongolist who became one of his own will and not due to a coincidence, like J. Kowalewski.⁷ What pushed him in this direction, we do not know. Perhaps in the beginning he was attracted by the East in general and in the course of his later studies he chose Mongolian field.

Anyhow, it is a fact that in 1891 Kotwicz was admitted to the Petersburg University and began his Eastern Languages Studies. During four years he gained basic knowledge of Chinese and Japanese but his true passion were Manchu and Mongolian languages. Precisely: not one Mongolian language but languages, as apart from classical Mongolian he learnt Kalmyk which perhaps interested him the most. He completed his education in 1895 and two possibilities opened up for him. The following year he took up job in the Eastern Section of the Ministry of Finance and later at his Alma Mater where he was asked to teach Mongolian and Manchu. We should say that this combination of duties proved very fortunate. His office job meant not only a higher salary but he could also use his knowledge in a practical way, gain a good grasp of Chinese and Mongolian affairs and establish useful contacts in those countries. At the start of the second decade of the 20th century Russia watched that region intently. Mongolian dignitaries began to think of separating from Beijing but for that Russia's assistance, including financial one, was necessary. In the summer of 1911 Russia and Mongolia talked about this in Petersburg. Kotwicz, who participated in the talks as a high official of the Ministry of Finance, gained such gratitude of the Mongols that, when their country became independent, they invited him to Mongolia immediately. That allowed him to organize an expedition to Mongolia in 1912. Though short (July-September 1912), it was very fruitful – it was then that Kotwicz discovered the previously mentioned Old Turkic monument.⁸ Unfortunately,

⁶ There is an extensive literature on J. Kowalewski, e.g. Kotwicz W. 1948. *Józef Kowalewski (1801–1878), orientalista*; Kałużyński S. 1969. *Kowalewski Józef Szczepan, w języku rosyjskim Osip Michajłowicz, (1801–1878)*; Valeev Ramil M., Kulganek Irina V., Tulisow J. 2009. *Professor O. M. Kowalewski – Mongolian studies scholar, traveller and enlightener*.

⁷ Among numerous biographies of W. Kotwicz are: Lewicki, M. 1953. *Władysław Kotwicz (20.III 1872–3.X 1944)*; Tulisow J. 1986. *Władysław Kotwicz*.

⁸ Tulisow J. et al 2012.

this turned out to be his only visit to that country – although in the following year Kotwicz was offered position of Mongolia’s financial advisor⁹ – he never went to the East again. He spent the time of the great war and the revolution in Russia and being Polish subsequently repatriated to Poland.

In Poland, Kotwicz’s activities were so diverse that here due to lack of space we can discuss them only in general. He lectured at the John Casimir University in Lviv (where he was offered a chair), for many years was president of the Polish Oriental Society, edited scholarly periodicals and himself kept on writing – a number of his most accurate works come from that period.¹⁰ Well, he even found time to go to Czechoslovakia with lectures for the Kalmyk diaspora. He did a lot for the development and prestige of Polish sciences, particularly for Mongolian studies which he basically created. Although today’s chair (or section, to be more precise) of Mongolian studies at the University of Warsaw was established after his death (in 1951), it was due to the efforts of his student Marian Lewicki. The section also took over the huge library of Kotwicz.¹¹

Unlike Turkish studies which are represented in several Polish centers, Mongolian studies can be found only at the University of Warsaw, in the previously mentioned chair.¹² It is not big; since its establishment, perhaps ten people have worked there. As far as Mongolists are concerned – as there are also Tibetologists – their output covers:

- a) Works on Middle Mongolian. Research on this language was initiated by the already mentioned M. Lewicki. Already before the war he published an article “Les inscriptions mongoles inédites en écriture carrée” (Lewicki M. 1937), and after the war he continued with a well-known work, the so-called *Houa-yi yi-yu* (Lewicki M. 1949, 1959).¹³ We can say that his successor is Stanisław Godziński, author of the monograph *Język średniomongolski [Middle Mongolian Language]* (Godziński S. 1985).
- b) Grammar books and other works whose purpose is to aid learning the language. These are: grammar of Classical Mongolian (Kałużyński S. 1998), grammar of Modern Mongolian (Godziński S. 1998) and a manual of Modern Mongolian (Rogala J. 2015). We should also add that for a long time Kotwicz’s grammar of Kalmyk language (first edition: 1915) was considered the best of its kind.

⁹ Bareja-Starzyńska A. 2014.

¹⁰ E.g. Kotwicz W. 1936. *Les pronoms dans les langues altaïques*; and Kotwicz w. 1939. *La langue mongole, parlée par les Ouïgours Jaunes près de Kan-tcheou*.

¹¹ Whereas Kotwicz’s archives are today kept in Kraków, in the so-called Archive of Polish Sciences under the joint administration of Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN) and Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences (PAU). Apart from personal documents and Kotwicz’s letters they contain manuscripts of his works, notes, photographs and many valuable documents in languages he researched.

¹² This institution has a complex history. In its early years it was called Chair of Indian (!) Philology and in 1954 was renamed Chair of Languages of Inner Asian Peoples. When the institute, as its mother unit, was reorganized and turned into a faculty, the chair was joined with Chair of Turkish Studies and together became the Department of Turkology and Inner Asian Peoples. Today it is officially a part of this Department.

¹³ *Houa-yi yi-yu* is a 14th-century anthology of Mongolian texts in Chinese transcription. It is the most important source of knowledge on Middle Mongolian next to the *Secret History of the Mongols*.

- c) Minor works on various texts, languages and grammatical issues. Most are authored by S. Godziński, cf. his “Observations sur quelques suffixes formant les noms en mongol contemporain” (Godziński S. 1970), or “Deux contes dagours de la region de Kouldja” (Godziński S. 1970).

(It should be clarified here once again that in this article we talk only about linguistic works. Warsaw Mongolists authored many more works, e.g. the translation of “The Secret History of the Mongols” by S. Kałużyński (1970) or “Mongolian treatise *Chikula kereglegchi*” by A. Bareja-Starzyńska (2006), but these should be discussed in a separate text.)

Thus, Polish Mongolian studies have – to put it concisely – this kind of history. As we can see, their roots are not too deep: if Poles accustomed themselves with Turkic peoples for centuries, they actually got to know the Mongols only in the 19th century. And what about their contacts with Tungus nations?

To simplify things we can say that Tungus languages can be divided as if into two groups: southern, represented by Manchu and northern, with Evenki as the best known language. Polish people learnt about nations speaking these languages quite early, already in the 17th century and that came from two different sources. The first information on the Manchus came from Jesuits who at that time were present in China (in Catholic Poland their books were willingly read),¹⁴ and on the northern Tungus (Evenks) – from compatriots who were sent to Siberia as war prisoners and managed to return.¹⁵ Of course, this information was scant. There is no evidence anyone in Poland knew any Tungus language at that time. The first Polish Tungusologist was actually Kowalewski, as he, apart from his activity in Mongolian studies, also mastered Manchu.

But the real pioneer in this field was Kotwicz, who not only taught Manchu for many years but also learnt certain Tungus dialects. And he was assisted by his students. As an employee of the Petersburg University Kotwicz devoted much of his time to them: he checked linguistic materials they collected, helped in publishing those and if any student for whatever reason was not able to do that, he published them himself.¹⁶ And as young people were interested in a wide scope of subjects, he received from them various materials: from Kalmyk to different Tungus texts.

¹⁴ The first European author who wrote a full report on the Manchu conquest of China was an Italian Jesuit M. Martini (Martinius). It is interesting that he dedicated his work *De bello tartarico historia* (Antwerp 1654) to John Casimir, King of Poland.

¹⁵ One of the lucky ones was Adam Kamiński Dłużyk. In his report from 1672 he mentioned, among others, the Tungus: “We arrived at a threshold they called Shamanic. We found naked people with faces painted in various flowers; men indistinguishable from women. They were known as the Tungus....” Kuczyński A. 1996. *Dwa polskie pamiętniki z Syberii [Two Polish Memoirs from Siberia]*, p. 27.

¹⁶ Cf. Kotwicz W. 1932. *Le dialecte tongous de Bargouzine. Matériaux recueillis par D. Rinčino*. D. Rinčino, who, as the title suggests, collected materials for this work, later became a Buryat activist and revolutionist, today better-known as Rinchingiin Elbegdorj. In 1908-1914 he studied at the University of Petersburg and although his field was law, he was attracted to research on the folklore of the Buryat peoples, which brought him close to Kotwicz.

Some of these materials Kotwicz later took to Poland. They included texts in Sibo language – of a tribe from Xinjiang related to the Manchus. The student who transcribed them – F. Muromski – died upon his return from China and thus his papers were taken over by Kotwicz. However, he also did not have time to work on them. It was done years later by S. Kałużyński.

Publication of Muromski's materials (Kałużyński S. 1977) was the biggest event in the history of Polish Tungus studies. Other achievements in this field have been so far rather humble. Apart from Kotwicz's publications they were mostly Kałużyński's articles on Sibo language spoken by the Sibo and Evenks – Solons (Kałużyński S. 1969, 1971, 1973, 1974, 1975). For the record, we should mention here also several works of Kałużyński's student J. Tulisow, author of these words, among them grammar of Manchu language (Tulisow J. 2000) and Manchu manual (Tulisow J. 2004).

Thus far we talked mainly about works on particular languages, but as was lightly mentioned before, Polish Altaists were also interested in comparative studies. Here, the greatest achievement was *Studia nad językami ąltajskimi* [Studies on Altaic Languages] by Kotwicz, published posthumously (Kotwicz W. 1951). However, other works (e.g. Lewicki M. 1938 and Jankowski H. 1987) should also be remembered. To a certain extent all publications dealing with borrowings are also comparative works. It ought to be clear that many of them deal with Altaic-Polish (e.g. Stachowski S. 2007) or Altaic-Slavic contacts (e.g. Lewicki M. 1937, Zajączkowski A. 1949, Stachowski S. 1967, 1992, Parzymies A. 2013). But there were also authors researching borrowings inside the Altaic language group (e.g. Kałużyński S. 1961, 1982).

To sum up, let us attempt to answer one more question: what do Polish Altaists think about the nature of relations between Altaic languages – are they family relations or historic bonds established in the course of long-term contacts? In other words: do they see these languages as a family or as a league? The author of this article knows in Poland one committed “anti-Altaist” and has not met any “pro-Altaists” ready to die for the concept of Altaic family. It seems that the prevalent view is that of the middle way: according to Kotwicz and others, Turkic, Mongolic and Tungus languages used to be three separate families.¹⁷ And perhaps this is how it was – anyway, it is not that important. As M. Stachowski wrote in one of his works: “Proving that the so-called Altaic languages are a genuine family is not a matter of life and death. But disproving this is not either.”¹⁸

¹⁷ Kotwicz W. 1951. “*Studia nad językami ąltajskimi*” [Studies on Altaic Languages], p. 37.

¹⁸ Stachowski M. 2012. “*Teoria ąltajska*” [Altaic Theory].