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From Oral Epic to the Written One: on One Type of Formulae in P. A. Ojunskey's Olonkho "Nyurgun Bootur the Swift"

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Abstract

Typology of differentiation between oral and literary eposes developed according to different traditions and was based on a variety of materials (M. Parry, A. Lord, A.N. Veselovsky, V.M. Zhirmunsky, M.I. Steblin-Kamensky, E.M. Meletinsky and others). *Formulaicity* remains one of the indicators of similarities and distinctions between the two types of epos – oral and written. The term was introduced by M. Parry and A. Lord; however, the problem of the nature and characteristics of formulaicity remains arguable under traditions which vary in their origins.

Olonkho by one of the first Yakut authors, P.A. Ojunskey allows one to trace the process of creation and producing of formulae within the space of an epic text of written origin. The author's epos includes the types of formulae in which narrator's personal name becomes a key element in not only creating alliteration, but also for unfolding the poetic meaning of the entire epic phrase. The analysis shown in the article indicates that despite the similarity in structure, each time the formula re-creates characteristic feature of a certain narrator's performance. This is an evidence of the name formulae of the type considered here being the symbol of the rising outside ("outside" of the culture) outlook from the writer on formulaicity in oral tradition. It is also shown that a written-origin epos is also characterized by formulaicity while the rules and mechanisms of its producing visibly differ from formulaicity of oral epos. The type of formulae considered presents author's poetic expression of their attitude to the preceding tradition of narrating. These formulae also allow (within their limits) a reconstruction of the epic environment. It is concluded that the distinction of the naming formula is not only limited to alliterating narrator's personal name. It also gives meaning to a trope (periphrasis, metaphor, simile) linked to the characteristics of narrator's unique manner.

Keywords: Oral tradition, Written tradition, Oral epos, Literary epos, Yakut epos olonkho, Narrator of folk Tales, Oral theory, Poetic diction, Oral formula, Formulaic language, Alliteration, Verse metrics.

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Introduction

According to M. Parry and A. Lord, formulaic character and presence in an oral epos of one of the regular, recurrent word-combinations marked by metric determination is one of the distinctions of oral tradition (Lord, 1994, p.72). *Formulaicity* however remains in the case of a “transitional” type of an epos itself, when literary processing of a traditional oral epos occurs thus giving birth to the so-called written or “literary” type of epos.

Academic research sources focusing on the distinction of the two types of epos – oral and written – are vast and works largely dwell on various traditions (Steblin-Kamensky, 1978; Meletinsky, 1979; 1998b; 2004; Smirnitskaya, 1994). The most productive among these appears to be the approach linked to the notion of formulaicity. The latter was elaborated within Parry-Lord’s theory of *oral tradition* (Lord, 1994). Methodologically significant from the perspective of the given work’s objective is the theory by A.N. Veselovsky (2007), continued by V.M. Zhirmunsky (1962), and further elaborated in the works by E.M. Meletinsky and his advocates and focusing on epos classification (2004; 1968; 1998b) and on distinctions of oral and literary types of epos, particularly (Landmarks of literary epos, 1978; Meletinsky, Neklyudov, & Novik, 2010, pp.11-41).

Character of formulae and the basis of their emergence in epic text could serve as the indicator of distinction between oral and literary types of epos (Landmarks of literary epos, 1978, pp.5-13; Meletinsky, 1998a, pp.382-400; Nagy, 2002, pp.37-58; Smirnitskaya, 1994, pp.207-219). However until now it is still not entirely clear what exactly is the nature of formulaic language based on the material of various traditions including ones where within a relatively short historical period both oral and literary types are represented. Among such traditions are the so-called “young-literary” literatures of the Siberian peoples, among the first literary texts of which one should consider the creation of literary epos based on the “living” and actively producing oral tradition. It is this type of *material* could be treated from both diachronic and particularly typological approach characteristic of the above-mentioned works which in its turn pre-determines the methodology and typological *methods* of study.

Platon Alexeyevich Sleptsov-Oyunsky, one of the 1920-1930s Yakut writers among his other literary works is known as the author of the first literary-processed, or authorial type of epos; namely, the “Djuluruyar Nyurgun Bootur” (“Nyurgun Bootor the Swift”, further “NB”). Oyunsky worked on it from 1929 to 1931. The work was preceded by a written research titled “Yakut fairy-tale (olonkho), its plot and contents” (1927) focused on the mythological and (for the first time) folkloristic aspects of the Yakut olonkho as a system of imagery beliefs. However, despite the first theoretical work, the peak of P.A. Oyunsky’s addressing the Yakut olonkho was creation of the literary precedent of the latter. Oyunsky’s name is closely associated with the tradition of literary olonkho, created as a result of synthesis and to a certain extent a conscious compilation of the existing versions of oral origins. According to the author, his “oral” repertoire consisted of at least 4 versions with the Nyurgun Bootur-centered plot, which he had heard from different olonkho-performers from the Taatta and Amga uluses (regions). During the younger years of his narrating practice he more than once performed one of the plot versions of Nyurgun Bootur. In the poetic preface to the edition of his olonkho P.A. Oyunsky mentions “thirty” (*otut*) olonkhos which served as the basis of his texts (“Out of the thirty olonkho roads// The olonkho was made//” (Oyunsky, 1959, p.5). In the given context it is possible that the word “*otut*” was used in the poetic text as a hyperbole, probably as alliteration. The author conceals neither his authorship, nor the fact that the olonkho was “written” by him.

Relevance of the given study is determined by the fact that one could identify a particular type of the so-called “name” formulae in the Yakut writer’s epos. They not as much mention and alliterate the narrator’s personal name, as characterize his performance manner. Therefore, the epic material by P.A. Oyunsky provides the possibility of analyzing the processes of formula-generation characteristic of the literary type

of olonkho. That is why the analysis of the indicated type of formulae could be viewed as relevant and determines the *aim of the research*.

Material of the research

Yakut folklore material takes a special place among other traditions of Siberian Turkic-speaking peoples both due to the level of archaic nature and conservation of poetic diction, and the level of preservation of the living epic tradition. V.M. Zhirmunsky (1968) was one of the first to suggest the archaic nature of the Yakut poetic verse. Yakut olonkho material was for the first time specifically considered by E.M. Meletinsky (2004, pp.247-375) in course of the typological description of the world epic traditions.

Methodology

Methodology of the research is determined by the conception of fundamental distinctions between folklore and literature, as stated by P.G. Bogatyrev and R.O. Jakobson (1971, pp.369-383). Also of methodological significance is the possibility of typological distinction between oral and literary traditions provided by M. Parry and A. Lord (Lord, 1994). Determining the aims of the research is E.M. Meletinsky and his students' comparative-typological methodology of types of epos classification (Meletinsky, 1979; 1998a; 2004) and distinguishing oral and literary epos (Landmarks of literary epos, 1978, pp.7-17).

The base of the work is the preference of selected text material analysis. Significant here is M.I. Steblin-Kamensky's remark on the importance of "given material", more suitable for "drawing general regularities" (Steblyn-Kamensky, 1978, pp.128-129). Undertaken in the work for the first time is formulae analysis as linked to the olonkhosut's (an olonkho narrator's) name, and as a textual consequence which, on the one hand, is marked by a certain structure and a unique mechanism of linguistic functioning, and on the other hand, an in-depth semantics of the traditional formulaic bulk. That is why *methods of the research* are complex and interdisciplinary in character, touching upon various humanities (linguistics, folklore studies, mythology and some others), and presenting a combination of diachronic and typological approaches. In relation to the Yakut material, the methods of inner reconstruction and typological method are used for the first time.

Epic environment and authorial olonkho

Determining in P.A. Oyunsky's works was local tradition (namely, that of the Taata region) which then was marked by advanced epic environment and was known from many famous olonkhosuts. Starting from 1800 and later on (in late 19th and early 20th centuries) there were around 300 olonkhosuts in the Taata region (Androsov, 2006, p.3). E.D. Androsov cites biographies and data on nearly 150 olonkhosuts based on the local elders' recollections (Androsov, 2003; 2006). Based on Androsov's materials, as well as the materials collected by researches and correspondents of the Yakut Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic Institute of Language and Literature (Now SB RAS Institute of the Humanities Research and Indigenous Studies of the North), the names of 185 olonkhosuts have been identified so far (Orosina, 2015, p.21). It is worth noting that "Djuluruyar Nyurgun Bootur" believed to be born in the Taatta region, could be found in the repertoires of olonkhosuts from other uluses.

The Oktyabr'sky nasleg (Cherkyekh village) where P.A. Oyunsky was born is known as the birthplace and home of such famous narrators as P. Sleptsov-Sahyl uola Mandylymyan, Uus Byotyuke, V.N. Sleptsov-Allaka Baaska, S.A. Savvin-Kuokhayaan, A.I. Kharlampyev-Kylachyy'ap, E.Y. Bytasytov, D.T. Elberyakov and many others. It is worth noting that P.A. Oyunsky was an excellent connoisseur of the oral folk traditions. According to the recollections from his friends and fellow-villagers, he was a rather skilled performer of

numerous olonkhos and folk songs even in an early age. Childhood friends remember him growing up in the atmosphere of authentic oral creative tradition. For instance, K.A. Sleptsov states that as a child Platon had “an obsession which continued throughout his life. It left a significant trace on his whole bulk of work. He loved listening songs and olonkhos. The boy would regularly slip away to visit a neighbor, Panteleymon Sleptov who was a specialist in olonkho, a very creative person and song performer. The boy used to sit at the old man’s for hours listening to his improvisations. By the age of 8-9 he was a narrator and performer himself, singing for his friends. Later the boy became a welcome guest among the adults. Everyone agreed that he has a good voice and a unique ability in verse” (Sleptsov, 2003, p.194). Yakut ASSR’s distinguished performer and later writer V.A. Savvin cited an elder from the Churapcha village who said back in 1920 at the local administration: “As a very young boy Platon was already a skilled olonkho narrator. I always believed him to become a famed olonkhosut” (Savvin, 1969, p.119). P.A. Oyunsky himself remembered: “As a child I had a rich and colorful imagination; I was very good with words. Toyons (local nobility and those in authority) invited me to listen to my narrations over long nights” (Oyunsky P.A.: Articles and memoirs (1893-1969), 1969, pp.2-4). Talented children used to first listen to singers and olonkhosuts and then began to narrate for their friends, then neighbors and family. When they grew up gaining some fame, they were invited by the local nobility. That was the path taken by the young Platon Oyunsky. His mother Evdokiya Ivanovna Unarova was born in the Zhuleisky nasleg, an area known for talented masters of oral folk art. It was the birthplace of famous olonkhosuts I. Fedorov-Uluu Kempes, V.F. Makarov-Babyat Makarov, N.T. Abramov, E.M. Egorov-Miine uola Djyogyose, I.N. Vinokurov-Tabakhyrov, N.I. Malgin (in some sources mentioned as Malginov)-Kyotyokhe uola and some others.

In “NB” olonkho the author in his own manner credited the famed olonkhosuts of Taatta and Amga regions who influenced him greatly: I.N. Vinokurova-Tabaakhyrap, T.V. Zakharova-Chebyi, S. Savvina-Kuokhayaan, A.S. Tatarinova, A.N. Kharlampyeva-Kylachyhap, M.N. Androsova-Ionova and others (Orosina, 2015, p.229). It is significant that this all found expression in the formula language of his epos. “Living” and actively producing epic environment is presented as a unique poetic attitude from the author. It is in P.A. Oyunsky’s “NB” where particular type of formulae which mention the narrator’s name and mark the poetic distinction of each of the olonkhosuts could be identified.

Results and Discussion

Analysis of formulae, containing name of the olonkhosut

Structurally, formulae containing name of the olonkhosut are quite similar and includes: (1) personal name + (2) comparative construction expressed by the post-position “kurduk” (in comparative meaning “like”, “as”, “similar to”), + (3) word combination or (complex) word (in transferred meaning). The key element in the semantics of the whole is the third structural part (3), which, firstly, always contains a trope meaning, being a trope (periphrasis or metaphor, sometimes similar as a trope), and secondly, tends to unfold the text. Despite the syntactic structure similarity, each formula is presented as an occasional utterance based on author’s formulaic characterization of a given narrator’s poetic manner.

Examples of formulae (further – E) of this type in P.A. Oyunsky’s olonkho are the following:

(E1): “*Emis Tyumeppiy kurduk eten djergeldjittექpine*”.

(E2). “*Kuhahana buollakhpyna Kuokhayaan ohonnyor kurduk kyulldjurhatan kiirdekhpine*”.

(E3). “*Akyym kurduk attarkakhkha*”..

(E4). “*Kylachyysap kurduk kytardakhkha*”. .

(E5). “*Yrgynyan kurduk yrytan kiirdekhkhe*”.

(E6). *"Tabaakhyrap kurduk tattaran ettekhkhe"*.

(E7). *"Onduruohan emeekhsin kurduk onoluya tuoydakhpyna"*.

(E8). *"Djuley Byokeen kurduk djyore tylynan tyhardekhpine"*.

Structure of name formulae. According to the formula-formation principle the indicated type of formulae could be divided into three types.

Type 1 – when word-formation pattern is built on the scheme: "Like a given narrator (=PN), their manner of performance" (E5; E6).

Personal name (=PN) + post-position "kurduk" + complex word-combination.

E5. *"Yrgynyan kurduk yrytan kiirdekhkhe"* ("If I begin to narrate in detail, just like the old Argunov) (translation by V. Derzhavin) (Oyunsky, 1975, p.9).

E6. *"Tabaakhyrap kurduk tattaran ettekhkhe"* ("If I begin passionately, like Tabarykhov I will narrate) (Oyunsky, 1975, p.9).

Both examples are based on similar syntactic structure, linked to the formula expression of a particular narrating manner. In the first case (E5) it is a very detailed description characteristic of the give olonkhusut and their narrating manner. In the second case (E6) a narrator's ability to extend the narration, which is also an individual characteristic feature, is mentioned in "formulaic" form. Of particular significance in this case are the word-combinations concluding the formulaic construction (*yrytan kiirdekhkhe; tattaran ettekhkhe*) in which the verbs expressing movement/action ("to enter"/ "to speak") are preceded by gerund forms ending in *-an* (*yryran; tattaran*), expressing a state or an additional actions related to the main action. This gives the whole phrase a predicate activity and multi-dimensionality. However, the "first-person" form of utterance has not yet been presented here. Trope character of this part of formula is created by characterizing the very manner of a narrator as if from an outside perspective ("outer") which is emphasized by the finite verb forms and main action related to them.

Type 2 – pattern of formula is expressed through the scheme: "Name of narrator (=PN) + like, as (*kurduk*) + paraphrased naming of manner of singing/ narration characteristic of a narrator" (E3; E4).

E3. *"Akyym kurduk attardakhkha"* ("If one verses like Akim does") (translated by authors: N.P., N.O.).

E4. *"Kylachyysap kurduk kytardakhkha"* ("If one connects by mixing, like Kylachysov does") (translated by authors: N.P., N.O.).

This type of formula is remarkable by its concluding words (*"attardakhkha", "kytardakhkha"*), rather unpredictable in general context and presenting an allegoric naming of narrator's performing characteristics. When introduced they seem to be words used in their direct meaning rather than tropes. In fact the formula re-creates a complex metaphoric meaning of these words, or more precisely, their archaic root stem (*attar-, kytar-*) which gives the whole utterance an associative complexity and occasional character. Both words represent periphrasis as a trope. In the given case the allegoric nature of the tropes is determined by avoidance of actually naming the word. Thus this is a periphrasis based on the metaphoric principle. Hence, the concluding part of formula in both cases consists of a word, the functional nature of which is comparable to the so-called "imagery words" in Yakut language (Turkic in origin). Usually "an imagery root elements of this words is dead, and meaning is often indefinite and vague" (Grammar of modern Yakut literary language. Phonetics and morphology, 1982, p.384). In the given case the archaic character of concluding formula makes it semantically indefinite. However those with an in-depth knowledge of formulaic language realize that this was a rather popular technique of using little-known or

little-understood words in poetic diction. For instance, in E3: meaning of *“attardakhkha”* is related to the archaic *attar* – “to sew together from small pieces of cloth; to carefully reflect, to weigh on, to calculate”.

E4 is remarkable due to the same principle of paraphrasing substitution of one word by another. Archaic character of *“kytardakhkha”* allows to treat it as an imagery word with “dead” root stem. *Kytar* – “to mix together, to join two elements”.

Type 3 – formulaic pattern which beside the known comparative structure of type 1 contains an element of hidden comparison with one’s own (= author’s) manner of narration (E1; E2; E7; E8).

E1. “*Emis Tyumeppiy kurduk eten djergeldjitttekhpine*” (“If I shall just like him, the white-headed narrator, just like the famed Tyumeppiy nicknamed “Cheebiy”, weave an even ornament-verse”) (translated by V.Derzhavin) (Oyunsky, 1975, p.8).

E2. “*Kyuhahana buollakhpyna Kuokhayaan ohonnyor kurduk kyudjurhatan kiirdekhpine*” (“Shall I build verse like the old Kuokhayaan, once in tongue-twister, once in song, that is how I shall start my tale”) (translated by V. Derzhavin) (Oyunsky, 1975, p.8).

E7. “*Onduruohan emeekhsin kurduk onoluya tuoydakhpyna*” (“Just like the old woman Androsova to praise drawingly and loudly”) (N.P., N.O.).

E8. “*Djuley Byokeen kurduk djuore tylynan tyuherdekhpine*” (“Just like Djuley Byokeen with “likened words” (=alliterations) I shall verse”) (translated by the authors: N.P., N.O.).

This type of formula building indicates use generally “first-person” form of narration whence narrator’s “I” is introduced into the text rather than “I” of an oral narrator which on the whole results in growing complexity of author’s presence in an epic text. Moreover, it is the given type of formula that appears to be more ornamented by both alliteration and explicate comparative constructions.

The nature of alliteration in E1, E2, E7, E8 indicates changes which determine the characteristics of literary epos. Of the four formulae only in E2 and E8 alliteration remains as the “leading” canonized repetition (Pokatilova, 1999, pp.25, 29). In the former (E2) it is [k]-alliteration; rather excessive but serving as the structuring element of verse. In the latter (E8) the structuring alliteration is built on the repetition of the root morphemes *djuley//djuore*, not related semantically. The most visible in E1 and E7 formulae is not as much alliteration itself, as accompanying assonant [e]-repetition (“*Emis Tyumeppiy kurduk eten djergeldjitttekhpine*”). Both examples indicate changes occurring in the epic text in course of transition from oral tradition to literary one. The primary alliterative repetition is gradually replaced by secondary assonant repetition which begins to take the key positions. For instance, in E7, along with the leading assonant repetition *Onduruohan//onoluya*, the secondary ones, positioned inside the word (*Emis// Tyumeppiy; Kuhahana// Kuokhayaan*) or near the end of line (verse finale) (*Tyumeppiy// djergeldjitttekhpine; kuldjurhatan// kiirdekhpine; tylynan// myuherdekhpine*) become almost equally important. Movement of the repetitions from the opening positions in the line (verse initials) to the end positions is yet to be studied more exhaustively and certainly requires further consideration.

In general all of the above corroborates formation of a different narrative position, uncharacteristic of the oral epic performance. Literary epos formula does not come into existence as a result of oral performance, flexibility of or oral text; but rather as a result of additional effort on the part of author and their poetic vision. In the given case the author’s attempt to poetically evaluate the narrating and performance skills of other olonkhosuts serves as occasional coincidence of the text. The moment of evaluative characteristics becomes the definitive one for the author.

Analysis shows that the character of repetitions is defined by the shift from alliterative repetition towards more pronounced ornamentalization, as well as creation of other types of repetitions, like assonance and

root rhyme. Whatever the etymology of certain tropes (or repetitions), overall they appear as a system, which in its turn presents a deliberate transformation of available poetic diction. For the first time in the process of formula-building the author dwells on the traditional system as a material while generating a complex, formula-metric new system which is occasional in its meaning. Individual meaning of the generated (rather than re-created) ever-similar structure is distinctive by its general semantics' additional sophistication and varied correlation of the descriptive and performative elements.

Syntagmatic sequence of formula unfolding in the given olonkho text is determined by author's objection of aestheticising the occasional moment of re-creating past traditions, including introduction of the moment as part of author's own "biography" as that of narrator's. Hence the accent on succession from the "Taatta"/ "Amga" local narrators' traditions expressed within formulaic characterology. Thus narrator's personal name as a designator of certain system of "their own" poetic skill, and in some cases of the whole narrating school becomes the key element in building formula.

Conclusion

Based on the material of P.A. Oyunsky's literary olonkho it should be suggested that the principles on which it was built as an epic text are cardinally different. Firstly, it is the absence of "collective censure" (according to P.G. Bogatyrev and R.O. Jakobson, 1971, 102) which is not characteristic of a folklore text. Secondly, the first authorial olonkho already displays an "outside" perspective of the narrative skills in general and certain narrators specifically. Thirdly, this is a particular level of formulae's fixed nature as evidenced by the similarity of their structure. Nevertheless, despite the clichéd character of formulae's syntactic structure each of them is increasingly occasional. Meaning of each formulaic expression is aimed at individualization of performance characteristics or even each narrators' individual style. All of the above were reflected in a special way of formula-building which sets P.A. Oyunsky's epic text apart from the bulk of others, among them from traditional oral text.

P.A. Oyunsky's olonkho unites knowledge of tradition and poetic skills (Pokatilova, 2015, p.102). One of the conceptual aspects of his poetic vision when generating an epic text is comprehension of certain narrators' individual performing manner and skill, realization of poetic diction of the preceding oral epic tradition in all its diversity, including within the confines of formulaic techniques. Principal distinction of the literary olonkho formulae from those of the traditional oral ones is in this case linked to the creation of an entirely different understanding of formulae in general. Rather than being borrowed from the general formulae bank of the tradition, formulae are each time created anew based on a certain scheme. Instead the semantic significance and some axiological hierarchy within an utterance itself begins to emerge on the forefront of a formula. "Author's" evaluating position towards narrator-olonkhosut becomes the determining aspect in the course of building the name formulae, which in its turn results in an important modification of an epic text: from oral to literary, from "unconscious" authorship to its realization. Because of this the character of alliterative repetition in P.A. Oyunsky's authorial formulae changes as well. Narrating school with its oral traditions is gradually replaced by creative, poetically and individually processed understanding and expression of the old masters' narrating manner. In this case we are dealing with poet P.A. Oyunsky reflection on oral epos and its formulaic language. Along with this the process of defolklorization occurs when introducing the new "literary" or "written" features to an epos (Landmarks of literary epos, 1978, pp.9-11). Peculiar mechanisms of this process were reflected in one of the analyzed types of formulaic poetic diction.

One of the results of the research is the possibility of reconstructing the epic environment which is partially undertaken by one of the authors. Uniqueness of the considered name formula lies not only in alliteration

of personal name, but also in creating a particular trope which is semantically pre-determined by the name and is summarized to another “formulaic” characteristics of a given narrator’s performing manner.

Author’s attitude towards the epic tradition is overall represented via formulaicity whence the latter is viewed as the general characteristic of the oral tradition and as its specific diction. All the analyzed formulae are linked to the problem of poetic diction with only the angle of perceiving its units changing from the perspectives of narrator, listener, and finally the author (creator of the epic text). Therefore the literary type of olonkho precedent set up by P.A. Oyunsky demonstrates a very conscious perception of epic tradition in general. From this viewpoint the author himself has more than once emphasized the cohesive and innovative nature of his work (Oyunsky, 1959, pp.5-6).

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