

A BOOK  
ABOUT  
A FASCINATING LANGUAGE  
OF  
A FASCINATING ETHNIC GROUP  
IN CHINA



鄂伦春语

# THE OROQEN LANGUAGE

ZHANG YANCHANG 张彦昌

LI BING 李兵

ANG XI 张晰

UNIVERSITY PRESS

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张彦昌 李 兵 张 晰 著

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## PREFACE

Oroqen, like its sister language Owenk, is a member of the North Tungusic division of the Tungusic branch of the Altaian family of languages. It is closely related to Hezhen, Sibo and Manchu, which constitute the South Tungusic division of the Tungusic language branch. Except for Sibo and Manchu, all the other Tungusic languages have no written forms.

Oroqen is characterized by its highly developed system of agglumerative suffixes and perfect vowel harmony. Its vocabulary is full of words reflecting the specific life pattern of the Oroqen people as skilled hunters.

According to the most recent statistics, Oroqen has about 2,500 speakers, settled down in Xunke, Heihe, Shibazhan and Baiyina of Heilongjiang Province and in the Oroqen Autonomous Banner of Inner Mongolia. In spite of the fact that the Oroqen language has no written form and its speakers scatter over the vast territory of Da Hinggan Ling no conspicuous linguistic divergences have been observed among the various settlements. This book is based on the dialect spoken by the Oroqens living in the Xunke County, Heilongjiang Province.

The Oroqen Language is the product of a research proj-

ect sponsored by the Education Commission of China, Besides the authors, the other participants in the field work include Associate Professor Xu Xiangwu, Mr. Ying Tiechao, Mr. Liu Yanfeng and Mr. Ge Xinmin. We enjoyed their company and greatly benefited from their valuable suggestions concerning the preparation of this book.

# PHONETICS

## 1. THE VOWEL SYSTEM

Oroqen has 17 vowels, of which 10 are short, 7 are long.

Short vowels are: i, e, ɛ, u, ʊ, o, ɔ, ə, a, y

Long vowels are: i:, u:, o:, ʊ:, ɔ:, ə:, a:

Except for e, ɛ and y, all the short vowels have their long counterparts.

The vowels in Oroqen are all oral vowels.

ʊ, ʊ:, ɔ, ɔ:, a, a: and ɛ are tense vowels whose production involves tension of the muscles of the vocal tract. ɛ is a tense vowel in a stressed syllable, but it weakens to ɛ̃ and becomes a lax vowel in unstressed syllables. i, i:, u, u:, ə, ə:, e, o, o:, and y are lax vowels both in stressed and unstressed syllables, as they are articulated with little tension.

According to the position of the tongue and lips and the degree of tension necessary for their production, the vowels in Oroqen are classified as follows:



	front		central		back	
	un- rounded	rounded	un- rounded	rounded	un- rounded	rounded
	lax tense	lax tense	lax tense	lax tense	lax tense	lax tense
close	i i:	y				u u u: u:
half- close	e					o o:
mid	ɛ		ə ə:			
half- open						ɔ ɔ:
open			a a:			

i is a front close unrounded vowel. It does not occur in the open syllable of a monosyllabic word, but it can be found in any syllable of a polysyllabic word. For example:

ənin	mother	dili	head
ilədə-	lick	inɲi	tongue
luki	arrow	head	vnadzi girl
ɕimvɐ	mouth	piece	tə:di dress

of a pipe

i: is the corresponding long vowel of i. It can occur in any syllable of a word. For example:

bi:	I	i:kə	wok
ɕi:	you	ɕi:lə	gallbladder

ni:      who      uni:—      sell

aɕi:    woman    mitti:      we

When i: occurs in the last syllable of an affixed root, it becomes shorter and is pronounced as [i]. For example:

i:rəm      is read as [i:rəm] (I) come in

uni:rən    is read as [uni:rən] (he) sells

niŋŋi:rəni is read as [niŋŋi:rə'ni] (you) scold

u is a back close rounded vowel. It occurs in polysyllabic words and in the closed syllable of a monosyllabic word. For example:

ukur      ox      umurun    thumb

ukun      milk    umukɕu    ice

urumu    thorn    kukin      daughter-in-law

ɕukə      axe      dzu:ɕdu    bee

u: is the corresponding long vowel of u. It may occur in any syllable. For example:

bu:      we                      bu:tɕə      give

ɕu:      you(plur.)      ɕuɕikun    cricket

gu:      bottle                  dzu:kin      otter

ənu:    illness                  ŋu:tə        pine tar

v is the corresponding tense vowel of u. In the production of v the mouth opens wider and the tongue is a little bit more retracted backwards. v never occurs in the open syllable of a monosyllabic word. For example:

bvwa    sky      mvin      horse

vla      quilt    vmvhta    egg

nagv    age      amvdzi    pond

ɔvwa summer tɕa:wvɔv day after tomorrow

v: is the corresponding long vowel of v. In the production of v: the tongue position is somewhere between (v) and (o) .

v: may occur in any syllable of a word. For example:

bv:g	stag	vv:n	hoof
amv:n	dung	tv:ra:—	read
malv:	northern	kv:ni—	shout
	heatable		
	brick bed		

vv:— pile up    akv:nar brother

e is a front half-close vowel. It is nonsyllabic and never occurs in the initial position of a word. It is always preceded by a consonant or a semi-vowel. Producing e involves little tension of the muscles of the tongue root, and the tongue body is kept in a natural position. For example:

nəp tɕe—	ovum	ko:ŋde	pit
əkɛlɔ:—	stamp(v)	əŋŋəmte—	kneel down
kəwɕe—	discuss	tutuɕe	dove
uɔle	cousins on the	tuwɔle	cousinship
	paternal side		

ɛ is the tense counterpart of e. It is a front mid vowel. In the production of ɛ, the tongue position is lower and the jaw opening is wider than that of e. ɛ is a non-syllabic sound. It is always preceded by a consonant or a semi-vowel. ɛ can occur in any syllable of a word. For example:

jEga	eye	ŋEla:	slope
bE	month	vlgEn	pig
Egna	ear	kʋŋGE	birch—bark bucket
mɔ:lEn	bullet	mEGan	heart

E is articulated as (ɛ̃) in a monsyllabic word as well as in the stressed open syllable. For example:

kʋŋGE is read as (k'vŋ'kɛ̃)

bE is read as (pjɛ̃)

E is palatalized after bilabials and apico-alveolars. For example:

bE	is read as	bjɛ̃	month
ʊktEn	is read as	ʊk't'jɛ̃n	cover(n)
mɔ:lEn	is read as	mɔ:l'jɛ̃n	bullet
mEGan	is read as	mjɛ̃'ɔan	heart

o is a back half-close rounded vowel. In its production the tongue position is somewhere between (ø) and (o) in the IPA. o can occur in any syllable of a word. For example:

dojɔn	April	oŋto	other
lok—	take off	olo:—	boil
olbot—	bathe	joldo	thin
olo:kit—	lie	okto:	frail

When o occurs in the first syllable and is not preceded by a consonant, it is close to (ʊ) in the IPA in pronunciation.

olo:—	is read as	(ʊ'lo:)	boil
olbot—	is read as	(ʊl'pot')	bathe
okto:	is read as	(ʊk't'o:)	frail

o: is the long counterpart of o. It can occur in any syllable of a word. For example:

mo:won	silver	dzo:n	October
bo:do	chopping	ko:rgo	bridge
	knife		
dzo:	February	olo:k	false
ko:to	knife	korgo:	cupboard

ɔ is a back half-open rounded vowel. It can occur in any syllable except for the open syllable of a monosyllabic word. For example:

boɔ	Autumn	omɔɛ	grandson
dɔɔbɔ	night	kɔŋgɛ	deaf
tɔɔki	wild boar	ɔnɔktɔ	ramie
tɔɔtɔ	beans	ɔktɔ	road

When ɔ occurs in the first syllable of a word and is not preceded by a consonant it is pronounced as {ɔ} with a wider jaw opening. For example:

omɔɛ	is read as	{ɔmɔ'ljɛ}	grandson
ɔnɔktɔ	is read as	{ɔnɔk'tɔ}	ramie
ɔktɔ	is read as	{ɔk'tɔ}	road

ɔ: is the long counterpart of ɔ. It can occur in both monosyllabic and polysyllabic words. For example:

nɔ:wɔɔ	ago	ɔ:ki	how many
mɔnɔ:	monkey	ɔ:ti	often
kɔ:kan	child	ɔ:ran	do
mɔ:	tree	ɔ:gikta	star

ɔ: is articulated as {wɔ:} When it occurs in the first syl-

lable of a word and is not preceded by a consonant. For example:

ɔ:ran is read as {wɔ:ʹran} do

ɔ:ki is read as {wɔ:ʹxi} how many

ɔ:ɣikta is read as {wɔ:ɣikʹtʹa} star

ə is a central vowel. It can occur in any syllable except for the open syllable of a monosyllabic word. For example:

dərə face əlu green onion

urkə door əŋəkə: aunt

tigdə rain bər bow

ulə meat tərgən cart

ə: is the long counterpart of ə. It is actually pronounced as {ɔ:} since in the production of it the jaw opening is wider than that of ə. For example:

ə:m medicine ərgilə: below

kə:kə cat dʒə:ktə rice

ulə:— dig gudə: belly

umə:tə earthworm kə:rə fruit—skin

a is a low central vowel and the tense counterpart of ə. a occurs only in polysyllabic words and is pronounced as {ʌ}.

buwa sky gara crotch

altan gold ilga flower

ilan three tɕawɔ sore

bira river ajan bend of a river

ɑ: is the long counterpart of a. It can occur in both monosyllabic and polysyllabic words. For example:



ila:n      light(n)      a:kin      liver  
 tima:na    tomorrow    dʒa:n      ten  
 ata:kE    spider      a:n      right side  
 dilga:tʃan fly(n)      dʒildʒima: swallow

y is a front close rounded vowel. Its frequency of occurrence is the lowest among Oroqen vowels. For example:

dʒyj nephew    dʒyjə saliva

## II. THE CONSONANT SYSTM

There are 17 consonants in Oroqen. According to the point and manner of articulation, they can be classified as follows:

		bilabial	apico- alveolar	hard- palate	soft- palate
stop	unaspirated	b	d		g
	aspirated	p	t		k
affricate	unaspirated			dʒ	
	aspirated			tʃ	
fricative				ɕ	
nasal		m	n	ɲ	ŋ
trill			r		
lateral			l		
semi-vowel		w		j	

In Oroqen stops and affricates are all voiceless sounds.

However, a distinction is made among them between aspiration and unaspiration. b, d, g, ~~dz~~ are voiceless unaspirated sounds and p, t, k, t<sub>h</sub> are voiceless aspirated sounds. Therefore, aspiration is an important feature capable of distinguishing meaning of words in the Oroqen language.

Compare:

bu:-	give	pu:	hot summer day
gudi	stomach	guti:	bitter
gadan	want	kattan	chop

The following table shows the possible positions a consonant may occupy in a syllable or a word:

cons.	the initial position of a word	onset	coda	the final position of a word
b	biliku mirror	dɔlbɔ	dʒəb-	gub all
p	pəjkələ:- kick	ləpə-	tɕap tɕi-	jaburap go
d	dərbu pillow	ədɪn	-	-
t	tari that	tə:ti clothes	əkɪt-	-
g	gərbi name	ulgur word	əgdə big	br:g stag
k	ko:to knife	i:kə pot	akki-	olo:k false
dʒ	dʒu: house	ɛnədʒi girl	-	-
tɕ	tɕa:wɛdɐ tomorrow	mʊk tɕika curve	-	-
ɕ	ɕiwa mud	acikacɪn just now	-	-
m	mɔ: tree	amʊ:n dung	damga cigarette	ilidam quick
n	na tɕv uncle	tamna fog	acɪnna- sleep	umun one
ɳ	ɳamɳa chase	mɔɳɔ: monkey	-	-
ŋ	ŋənə go	ɳŋɳaki goose	ɪŋgi tongue	ɪŋ mill
r	-	urə seeds	irgə tail	mətər again
l	luki arrow	ɔlə fish	ilga flower	kɔrgɔl pheasant
w	wa:- kill	awi shoe	təwlə: pick	arakiw (my)wine
j	jɕɛa eye	bəju- hunt	əjdʒə mudbrick	dalai sea