

<https://doi.org/10.3176/lu.1997.1.07>

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## SOME PROBLEMS OF FORMATION AND FUNCTIONING OF THE MARI LITERARY LANGUAGE

### 1. The History of the Literary Language Formation

There is still no certainty in the determination of the beginning of the Mari literary language. For a long time it was believed that the written language and the Mari literary language appeared only after the revolution of 1917. Currently this mistaken assumption has been corrected on the basis of a close study of all written documents in the Mari language (Иванов 1975). The time of the appearance of the Mari written language dates back to the 18th century and the literary language to the 70s of the 19th century. This interpretation, at least, correctly reflects the historical development of the written stage of the Mari language. However some refinements should be added.

First, this raises the question whether there existed any mode of non-oral information transmission before the 18th century, i.e. before the appearance of the present day written language. Research has shown that at present there are all grounds to answer this question positively. The evidence for the past written language should be sought for in legends, folktales, customs and traditions, religious rites, embroidery, etc. Specific techniques of information transmission in time and distance, like some neighbouring people had, existed also among the Mari. The following is to testify to this fact:

1) The existence of special signs — *тиште*. They were engraved into wooden planks, called *шерева*. The *тиште* on planks provided information about the oncoming prayer meetings, debts, credits, etc. The expression *шеревам колташ* in religious rites exists even nowadays, though messages are not sent on planks but in usual letters. This way of information transmission existed till the early 20th century simultaneously with contemporary written language. There are no reliable data about the time of its appearance. It is believed the Mari had this kind of writing before the first contacts with Russians (Картъял, Янай 1991 : 148). Several scholars have written about the existence of such writing among the Mari (Смирнов 1889 : 234; Гусев 1973 : 151—162; Пенгитов 1960 : 151—157). Ancient Mari *тиште* can still be found in the archives and different publications, but their meaning has not been deciphered.

2) Traces of *тиште* usage for recording ethnic (heathen) religious rites. Among other factors, this has been proved by the use of "engraved writing" to inform the eastern Mari of a coming praying ritual. Such a *тиште* function has been noted by some archaeologists.

3) Mari embroidery. Many embroidery patterns, resembling ancient hieroglyphs, conveyed certain information in the past.

4) Existence of the word for denoting the action of writing, scribbling — *возаш*. Scholars state that it has come into the Mari language from Iranian languages not later than the third century A.D. (Гордеев 1983 : 19—20). It is an important argument in favour of this hypothesis.

Thus, the *тиште* were the first attempt among the Mari in creating their own written

language. But they neither formed a system nor gained a widespread acceptance because of the Mari isolation as a consequence of Russian colonization.

The word *tište* itself is of Finno-Ugric origin (cf. Finnish *tähti*, Estonian *täht*, Mordvinian *теште* 'a star'). In the Mari language it lost its original meaning and began to be used in the meaning of the sign of a religious district. Then this word was applied to the district itself. Later it acquired the meaning of a sign, a banner, colours in general. In the post-revolutionary period this word began to be used in the meaning of a letter. From this meaning the word *тиштеп* 'an alphabet' was derived. Later on it disappeared.

Thus, it can be concluded about the Mari written language that a specific written language existed till the 18th century, it was manifested as a runic script, the main elements of which were *tište* and it differed essentially from the contemporary written language.

One more issue requires refinements — what can be considered a document of the literary language. Many nations connect the appearance of the written language with the publishing of the first grammar book, the Bible or even the first primer. The appearance of the written language on the basis of these factors is treated among Finnish, Hungarian and Estonian scholars (ОФУЯ 1975 : 146—147, 171; A. Kask 1970 : 8). Therefore, is a good reason to assert that the time of the beginning of the Mari literary language was the publication of the first Mari grammar in 1775. This means:

1) The alphabet was created for the Mari language which was based on the Russian alphabet with some adaptations for the Mari language. This alphabet was used for a hundred years, till the 70s of the 19th century. All publications of this period used the alphabet and spelling of the grammar of 1775.

2) The trend was toward the creation of the common written language. The grammar was normative — the basic rules of word usage in speech were given there. Practically the words of all dialects were presented, among them 70 words from the hill dialect, although the grammar was compiled on a single dialectal basis.

3) The absence of the division in the Mari language into separate dialects, which is rather significant. The grammar viewed the language presented there as an indivisible common means of communication for all the Mari. It is an obvious marker of the literary language.

4) Manifestation of a kind of standardization expressed in the choice of words for illustration, an attempt at unification of some morphological forms, conscientious interference in the word-building process.

5) Last, but not least, the use of the grammar for teaching the Mari language.

The third moment which needs clarification refers to the observing of the historical principle in appreciation of the documents of the literary language. Mari scholars treat written materials with the criteria of contemporary literary language, imposing on them the requirements of the contemporary level of normalization. On this basis they are not inclined to refer the printed texts of the pre-revolutionary period to the literary sources, which is contrary to reality. The published texts of the 18th century, this fact considered, should be referred to as literary documents, though they are characterized by a lesser degree of standardization.

The fourth problem, which needs clarification and a more scientific definition is the formation of the dialectal basis for the literary language. It is necessary to bear in mind that before the 30s of the 19th century the Mari written language had not developed on dialects as it was considered before. It was a period of search for the dialectal basis of the literary language. Books were written in dialects — the hill and the meadow — but without pointing to it. But for the subjective factors in the middle of the 19th century, any of them could have become the basis for the national literary language. The grammar of 1775 and A. Albinski's grammar of 1837 did not have any indications to the dialect, though the former was mainly based on the meadow, the latter on the hill dialect. Both had a claim on the reflection of the Mari language peculiarities. The first books published in Mari were also without dialectal indication. The short catechism of 1804, for example, was written in the meadow dialect, the second book published in 1808 was written in the hill dialect, and so was the gospel of 1821. And only the "Начатки христианского учения..." published in 1832 had an indication to the dialect. What this means is that during the period under review the Mari literary lan-

guage was not divided into the meadow and the hill dialects. This fact is worthy of notice and scholars' attention should be called to it. It should be borne in mind that in the following editions till the 70s of the 19th century an indication to the dialects was made quite formally and they were of a sporadic character. It should be realized that at an early stage of the Mari written language development there was no division into two varieties, there was a natural struggle for the dialectal basis of the literary language. Publications in dialects were the result of the official Russian tsarist autocracy against the unity of aboriginal population.

The statements above provide a possibility for presenting an objective history of the Mari literary language and establishing more precisely the time of its appearance.

While examining the history of the Mari literary language development, it is necessary to be aware of one more circumstance. Initially (18th century — the 70s of the 19th century) the Mari literary language developed in two variants — on the basis of the Cyrillic and the Latin alphabets. The first recordings of Mari words and texts, compilation of scholarly grammars were carried out by foreign researchers. They used the Latin alphabet trying to adapt it to the Mari language. Those were the first records of Mari words effected by the Dutch scholar H. Witsen (1705), and also the entries of the Mari words in the books by G. F. Miller (1758), J. G. Georgi (1776), I. P. Falk (1785), J. E. Fischer (1768), D. G. Messerschmidt (manuscript), Ph. J. v. Strahlenberg (1830), in M. A. Castrén's (1845) and F. J. Wiedemann's (1847) grammar books. The translations of the Bible used Latin alphabet too.

The Mari literary language entered a new stage of its development in the 70s of the 19th century. During that period the publication of books increased markedly, their language being elaborated and the written language acquiring contemporary features. In my early works I called it the period of the Mari literary language appearance (Иванов 1975). But from the contemporary approach to understanding of the literary language as a historical category, the character and the degree of normalization of which depend on the concrete historical situation, the 70s of the 19th century should be viewed as the time of the *contemporary* literary language appearance, not the literary language in general. During that period 1) simplification of the written language occurred; the language became clearer to common people; 2) the dialect basis — the meadow Mari — was determined, although books were published in dialects at the early stage of the language development; 3) the contemporary Mari alphabet was created; 4) the foundations of contemporary spelling were adopted.

During that period (1870—1917) the task of creation of a single national language was set. Different textbooks, handbooks, the newspaper "Война Увер" ("War News") appeared, the contemporary system of style was devised, the sphere of literary language application enlarged becoming richer in style variations.

Thus, the Mari literary language cannot be called a language with a short written history as it is understood in native scholarly literature. Its history can be divided into two periods: the old Mari literary language which embraces the period of the 18th century till the 70s of the 19th century and the contemporary literary language which began in the 70s of the 19th century.

The Mari literary language over the course of its history has been developing as if in circles (cyclic evolution). Each new stage rejected the achievements of the preceding stage, in consequence of which every new stage started from the beginning without the support of the previous experience. An impression was formed as if the literary language before each new turn had not existed at all. It was this emotional impression that led to the conclusion that the Mari literary language appeared only after the revolution of 1917. Its intensive development during this period, comparable only with the time of its appearance, gave grounds for such thinking.

## 2. Contemporary State of the Mari Literary Language

According to the latest census of population (1989) there were 671,000 Maris. 542,000 or 80.8% called Mari their mother tongue. More than half of the Mari live outside the Republic of Mari. The majority of the Mari who do not speak the mother tongue are among them.

There are only 6.3% of the Mari in the Republic of Mari who do not consider the Mari language their native language.

The contemporary Mari language from the linguistic point of view is quite fit to fulfil communicative functions on the national level. It has more or less stable lexico-grammatical, spelling and orthoepic norms, a sufficient vocabulary and is supported by the state. The language has all the necessary prerequisites "to serve" its bearers in all spheres of their activities. However, for a variety of reasons it has not been able to become a multifunctional national means of communication among the Mari. The main reason for its inadequate spreading among the Mari is its unilateral Mari-Russian bilingualism, many functions of which are fulfilled by the Russian language. The narrowing of the sphere of the Mari literary language application has taken place for several reasons:

1) It has ceased to be the language of education. At present it is the language of instruction only in primary schools. It is taught as a special subject in secondary schools, in teachers' training colleges, at the University and the Teachers' Training Institute. The use of the Mari language as the means of getting education was markedly narrowed in the years of stagnation (in the 70s and 80s), when teaching in the mother tongue in incomplete secondary schools was stopped.

2) It is not used in government institutions, though formally it has always been the state language of the Republic of Mari, first proclaimed in 1921 ("Йошкар кече", 1921), then confirmed by the Presidium of Regional Executive Committee in 1923. But in the Constitution of the Mari ASSR, adopted in 1936, this decision was simply held back. The role of the Mari language in government institutions was notably reduced after 1937.

3) It has a restricted use in press, radio, television. At present there are 4 national and 13 regional newspapers and 4 magazines in Mari. The Mari radio broadcasts in the Mari language only 10 hours per week, and so does television.

4) One of the serious reasons for the decrease of the sphere of the Mari language application is a low level of national self-consciousness among the Mari, especially among the intelligentsia. This includes lots of leaders, state officials, workers in enterprises, organizations. A considerable part of the Mari population has vague ideas about the role of the literary language in the life of the nation, in its economic and cultural development. There is lack of understanding of the social role of the mother tongue. An essential factor is also the absence of hereditary intelligentsia brought up on national traditions. The psychological side in the Mari society development is an important factor in strengthening the position of the Mari literary language at present.

The Mari language is characterised by its dialectal heterogeneity. There are about 20 dialects divided into 4 groups (Иванов 1982). It creates certain difficulties for the functioning of the literary language as a means of national communication. Besides, the use of the Mari language in the Republic is restricted by the following factors: domination of Russian population (56.7% Russian, 43.3% Mari population), only 29.2% of the Mari live in towns; a considerable part of the Mari (57.7%) lives outside the Republic; two variants of the literary language — the meadow and the hill variants; publication of books and magazines in dialects even at present. Since 1991 the newspaper "Чолман" has been published for the eastern Mari living in Bashkiria. The fact is gratifying in itself, but it has become a hindering factor for the single national language development, as the newspaper is being published in the dialect, not in the literary language. In 1994, as if for a good reason, an ABC book in the northern-western dialect was published. The written hill language has been developing nowadays. As it is, the literary language is losing its uniting function. Recommendations of scholars on the problem of language development are not taken into account by the authorities.

At the same time consideration must be given to some positive moments which have had a beneficial effect on the development of the language situation in the Republic of Mari. They are:

1) Growth of the Mari population. Despite all the negative moments, there are encouraging factors in the demographic development of the Mari people. Over the past century the number of the Mari has doubled. Compare the following figures: 1887 — 375,200, 1926 —

428,200, 1939 — 481,300, 1959 — 504,200, 1970 — 598,600, 1979 — 622,000, 1989 — 670,900 (Марийшы 1992 : 5).

2) A perceptible change in the manifestation of national identity. Currently it is being shaped noticeably. Democratization of the society has influenced the awakening of national consciousness, given rise to the movement for the national rebirth of the Mari. Rehabilitation of the language and cultural achievements of the 20—30s, noticeable success of Mari fiction, impressive progress of Mari linguistics are of considerable importance in the prestige increase of the Mari language.

3) Gradual promotion of the Mari language and literature in schools, introduction of the history of culture as a school subject. At present the Mari language and literature are being taught in 236 schools, the history of culture in 227 schools. Besides, as the state language of the Republic of Mari El, Mari is taught in 114 Russian language schools, in 284 kindergartens, in 10 secondary special educational establishments. In Mari University there is the Department of Mari philology, where some subjects (Philosophy, Introduction to General Linguistics, Introduction to Literature, English, Finnish, Estonian) are taught in Mari. This contributes to the beneficial conditions of the spread of the literary language.

4) Some important Republican government decisions on the Mari language functions have been adopted, one of them being the Constitution of the Republic of Mari El, where the Mari language is proclaimed the state language within the Republic of Mari together with Russian. "Education Law" has been adopted where the restoration of schools with the Mari language as the language of instruction is provided. "Conception of Education in Mari El", the programme "National School" and "Language Law" are under development. Much attention is paid to the problems of the literary language in them. Thus, a favourable atmosphere for the literary language development has been created.

Thus, recently a number of positive moments have appeared, which are able to improve the language situation in the Republic of Mari El. It can be asserted that the functioning of the Mari literary language has entered a new phase, taken a new turn in its development. These are essential prerequisites for the Mari language to become a single national means of communication at this new stage. But the Mari community has still to handle some serious problems, which can be solved on condition that there is an expressed interest in them.

### 3. The Mari literary language problems

One of the most urgent problems of the contemporary Mari society is the preservation of the language community. That means the creation of new conditions for further development and functioning of the literary language. The notion "preservation of the language community" includes expansion of communicative functions of the literary language, increase of the importance of its social status, creation of its sphere of existence. In a word, the language sphere is the ground which feeds the literary language with its life-giving force. It presents a chain of interrelated phenomena, the main components of which in the contemporary Mari society are the following:

1) Preparation of background for the development of "language ecology" — teaching Mari in the family, in pre-school educational establishments, at schools, etc. In the Republic of Mari El there are no pre-school educational establishments teaching good literary language, even in the countryside. This is the greatest drawback in the system of language teaching in Mari El, although recently some work in this sphere has started. Thus, in Joškar-Ola in 36 kindergartens the Mari language is taught as a separate subject.

An important part of this process is the conversion of the Mari language into the language of education in the full meaning of this word. At present one cannot say that the Mari language is the means of getting education. It fulfils this function only partially — in primary schools in the countryside. It is necessary that all subjects in schools be taught in Mari. The conditions have already been created, e.g. in "Education Law" adopted recently the Mari language is legally proclaimed the means of getting education.

Of no less importance in strengthening the position of the literary language is its use as language of instruction in the institutions of higher education. It is a very difficult problem

in Mari El, although some progress has been made. As mentioned above, there is an attempt to teach some subject in Mari at Mari State University.

So, one of the most important factors is creating the language milieu in schools in the broad sense of the word.

2) The conversion of the Mari language into a state language of the Republic of Mari in reality. Although it has an official status now, it does not fulfil this function. In business communication of state institutions and clerical work the Russian language prevails. The Mari language is used in some laws, international treaties, decrees and agreements, but these documents are not compiled in Mari, they are translated into it and sometimes not adequately. They cannot play a decisive role in establishing the literary language predetermined by the very essence of these documents.

3) The use of the language as the means of mass information. There are problems in this sphere as well, but fewer in comparison with others. The main problem at present is the reduction of circulation of newspapers and magazines. The reasons are the lack of means for their publishing and the shortage of money among the population. Commercial edition has a negative effect on their circulation, which, being insignificant, cannot compete. It has also a negative effect on the spreading of the literary language.

4) The situation in book publication is analogous. Nowadays fiction is mainly published in Mari. Though, of course, there are some editions of educational literature and less scholarly works are published. Technical, scientific and philosophical works are not published in Mari at all. As a result, there is no scientific-technical style in the Mari language. It is substituted by the Russian language.

The creation of the language milieu is one of the most important problems in the contemporary Mari society. The absence of this component testifies to the fact that the literary language is not polyfunctional, it has not solved the main problem. The society itself is to be blamed for this situation. A considerable part of the language community has not realized yet that the language as a social phenomenon can normally develop under the condition of many-sided functioning.

The following problem of the Mari literary language is the problem of language in upbringing its bearers. At the present stage of the development of the Mari society, this circumstance is acquiring great significance. Many Maris have a vague notion of the importance and significance of the mother tongue in building up a personality, developing culture and preserving the nationality. A part of the Mari population is of the opinion that teaching the mother tongue at schools, to say nothing of teaching all the subjects in Mari, can hinder their children's education and future career. Hence their disapproving and sometimes contemptible attitude towards the education in the native language. Disregard for the native language is especially noticeable among the Mari living in towns, surrounded by compact Russian population. It is not their fault: in towns there are neither Mari kindergartens, nor Mari schools. The psychological moment also plays an important part in it — contemptible attitude of Russians to conversations in Mari. This way generations of the Mari growing up in town get a good education, but do not know their mother tongue. So, the Mari literary language becomes depleted of the very important town milieu with its high intellectual potential. At present the reserve of the Mari literary language is the village. No doubt, the village is the keeper of the language and culture uniqueness, creator of the beneficial milieu for further development and perfection of the literary language. Nevertheless, the orientation only to the language of the village, to the demands of rural population adversely affects the development of the literary language, hinders its further progress.

Furthermore, the language milieu of the village experiences a disastrous influence of one-sided bilingualism. The majority of the Mari population know Mari inadequately, new generations do not know the richness of the language, its lexico-grammatical, figurative and image-bearing potentialities. Russian-Mari bilingualism — which is a positive phenomenon in the personality development in general — plays a fatal role in this process.

This circumstance brings to mind another aspect of the role of language in upbringing — edition of different handbooks, dictionaries, books on speech culture. The Mari people speaking Mari have vague ideas about the Mari speech culture. This holds true even of intel-

ligentsia, well-educated people. Mari linguistics has made a considerable progress in theoretical investigations, but it has left aside one of the most important aspects of the literary language development — the provision of necessary handbooks, lexicographical material. It is necessary to prepare and publish different types of dictionaries — orthoepic, defining, bilingual, frequency dictionary, dictionary of new words, phraseological dictionary, dictionaries for the radio and TV workers, etc.

Of great importance in language education of the population is propagandistic work. Popularization of knowledge on language, history of the people, history of culture, information on the history and culture of more developed cognate Finno-Ugric nations could help to raise self-consciousness of the nation, remove the psychological barrier towards the mother tongue, fixed in the consciousness of the contemporary Mari. Many people simply do not understand the importance of their native language owing to their ignorance. Issues of the native language and culture have not been brought to their attention, and they are unaware of them. The task of scholars is to help them look at language processes with the eyes of language bearers interested in its existence as the means of communication of the descendants. It is necessary to make each language bearer understand that the mother tongue "has been greatest folk-tutor teaching people at the time when there were neither books, nor schools, and continues to teach them up to the completion of the people's history. A child, acquiring the mother tongue, does not learn only abstract symbols, but drinks spiritual life and strength from the native words" (Ушинский 1854 : 543).

Writing on language surroundings one cannot avoid the question of bilingual situation in the Mari society. At present bilingualism in Mari El is one of the important components of the language situation. It has specific features: only those whose mother tongue is Mari are bilingual. All the Mari people at present know the Russian language well. But not many Russian know the Mari language. This circumstance creates a pessimistic and even a negative attitude towards the mother tongue among the Mari population. A child becomes indifferent to his mother tongue before acquiring it well enough, thereby hampering the development of his mental faculties. He becomes depleted of the joy of the world cognition with the help of the mother tongue. As a result, the language milieu and the intellectual national potential grow scarce. It is impossible to imagine our contemporary life without a good knowledge of the Russian language at the present stage of the development of the Mari society, as it opens up fresh opportunities. But it is by no means a reason for negation of the native language role in shaping the personality, in moulding the mental faculties with it. Only having mastered his mother tongue a child may adequately acquire some other languages, among them Russian.

A broad spectrum of important problems arises from the so-called conscious interference with the process of the literary language development. By this I mean deliberate purposeful control of separate aspects of language perfection. The depth of the rational influence is dictated by the concrete language situation. The Mari literary language at the present stage of its development needs a rather substantial intervention.

In the contemporary Mari language there is lack of lexical means for many-sided functioning of the literary language there are not enough terms in certain branches of science, in particular in social-political, technical and natural sciences, as well as in economics. This circumstance creates certain difficulties for the expansion of the Mari language. But on the other hand, it is the narrowness of the sphere of application which does not allow the development of terminology in Mari. Thus, a certain closed circle has been created. Only an active conscious influence on language processes can break it.

There are many ways of influencing the world-building process at present. First and foremost, it is the creation of new words on the basis of world-building capacities of the language itself. The Mari language possesses a considerable stock of world-building means, especially suffixes. There are more than 130 units. But the majority of them are synonymous and not productive, and consequently of little use in the creation of new words, although it is possible to use them. As an illustration let us consider the following formations: *корнешке* 'a companion', *улык* 'an innovation', *иўлтыш* 'fuel', *ужык* 'eyesight', *умыш* 'plentitude', *ушык* 'union', *уначе* 'hospitable', *патырешке* 'courageous', *виктем* 'management, government'. This way may be successfully used for the replenishment of lexis.

Word-composition in the Mari language, like in many other Finno-Ugric languages, is rather productive. Although the contemporary Mari linguistics does not use it fully, word-composition still plays a certain role nowadays: *кылгудо* 'and embassy', *унагудо* 'a hotel', *тјшкагудо* 'a hostel', *мерьен* 'a public figure', *шанчыен* 'a scholar', *йгырмут* 'a compound word', *јчаштан* 'a rival', *писылудыш* 'a tongue-twister', etc. It is significant that the second part of some compounds can be abstracted to the meaning of a suffix. Thus, such elements as *ver* 'a place' (*кочмывер* 'a dining room, a canteen', *малымывер* 'a bedroom', *пурмывер* 'a lavatory', *кончывер* 'a stage', *ончылвер* 'a hall', *вуйвер* 'a presidium'), *кудо* 'a house, a lodging' (*кылгудо* 'an embassy', *тјшкагудо* 'a hostel', *ыштыккудо* 'an enterprise', *пашагудо* 'an office'), *вундо* 'the meaning of collectiveness' (*мутвундо* 'a word-stock', *йјжк-вундо* 'a sound inventory', *пырчывундо* 'a corn, grain reservation', *акылаундо* 'an intellect') may be generalized to the meaning of suffixes. The words *пече* 'a yard', *вуй* 'a head', *ен* 'a man', may be also used as these elements.

The richness of dialectal variety is still a reliable reserve of the literary language. Mari dialects are abundant in lexis. They can substantially enrich the word-stock of the literary language. It is appropriate to use them in the literary language in two cases: a) when there is not a word to express a certain notion in the literary language, but it exists in one of the dialects. For example, there is not a word to express the notion 'consciousness' in the literary language, but there is such a word in the hill dialect (*šam*) — it can be introduced, perhaps, in the philosophical meaning of 'consciousness'; b) when a dialectal word enters the group of synonyms to a literary word. The Mari language is very rich in such words, they can be used for expressing different shades of meaning, as terms. The Synonyms of the word 'meat' can serve as an illustration to the previous statement. There is a row of words for expressing this notion in the dialects: *шыл*, *пай*, *йёр*, *пызе*, *цици*, *пан*, *яр*, *шыянызе*. Each of these words may be used to denote different kinds of meat: *шыл* 'meat' (in general); *пызе* 'boiled meate', *пай* 'fried meat', *йёр* 'smoked meat', *яр* 'salted pork fat', *пан* 'ham', *шыянызе* 'lean meat'. Dialectal words denoting colour or different shades of it, may significantly enrich the literary language as there are more than 200 words in this semantic field. For example, to denote the blue colour there are the following words: *канде*, *симсе*, *пелганде*, *корак*, *ёрза*, *йорза*, *гјл*, *чалка*, *зангар*, *көк*, *кловой*, *симсака*, *волгыдо-канде*, *ошалге-канде*, *кандалге-сур*, *шем-канде*, *чевер-канде*, *пйтсалгы-кловой*, etc. Using them for different shades of the blue colour might enrich the literary language, make it fuller and more flexible. Dialectal names of plants, animals, insects, fish, mushrooms are essential for the literary language. The hill dialect may be very helpful in this respect, as its potentials can be beneficial for the creation of the common lexical word-stock, thus solving the problem of drawing two literary norms closer to each other.

There are some other ways of enriching the word-stock using its own potentials (extension, change of the meaning of already existing words), use of archaic words, neologisms of the 20-30s, etc.). A thoughtful concerned approach to them will show new ways for the lexical enrichment of the literary language.

Another problem is the replenishment of the Mari literary language with foreign borrowings. At present the Mari language borrows words only from Russian.

Borrowing from the other language in a bilingual situation is a natural phenomenon. It is one of the ways of enriching any language. But in case of the Mari language at present it acquires a slightly negative meaning. The process of borrowing in the contemporary Mari during the past years has been done to such an extent that its continuation on the same scale would be disastrous. Borrowing can not be endless, there should be limits, the exceeding of which would lead to undesirable consequences — the disappearance of the language itself. This may happen to the Mari language if the attitude towards this process does not change and if it is not consciously regulated. The society should resist endless borrowings.

The contemporary Mari, especially the intelligentsia, use too many Russian borrowings in their speech. This is especially true of the technical intelligentsia, representatives of management and some other groups, not directly connected with the cultural life of the Mari people. It happens because of insufficient knowledge of the literary language and their own dialects. It is impossible to blame them for this situation, the roots of it go deeper, into the



educational system existing at present in the Republic of Mari. Such people never studied their native language, and if they did, it was a subject of "secondary" importance. This circumstance has led to the weakening or even loss of the "mother tongue feeling". It is a direct result of debarring the Mari language from its educational function.

Another aspect of the process of borrowing is the adaptation of borrowed words. At present they are not adjusted to the norms of the Mari language. Linguists try to identify the orthography of borrowed words with the original. It is difficult to agree with it. It is an unreasonable attitude towards the fate of the language. The borrowed words should undergo phonetic and especially orthographic changes, because its orthography predetermines orthoepy and influences the whole phonetic system of the language.

The growth of borrowings at present produces a serious problem for conscious regulation of the process. Reference to the connection of the literary language with the colloquial speech in this case (as some scholars try to explain the multiple use of Russian words) is not justifiable. The literary language should not be influenced by colloquial speech, on the contrary, functioning as a means of education, the language should regulate it.

One of the most serious problems of the contemporary Mari society is the creation of the language unity on the national scale. At present the Mari literary language functions in two variants. The Mari, like some people, do not have a single national language. Its creation is one of the main concerns of the Mari society. Recently, in connection with the perestrojka anarchy, there was a distortion in this sphere as well. Instead of a coordinated solution and agreement the situation has become aggravated. Some incompetent journalists have persistently been advocating a false understanding of the processes of language development on the mistaken assumption of interdialectal relation in the process of the literary language appearance. The already forgotten statements about the existence of two languages have begun to appear in the press again. Based on emotions, they have found supporters even among the scholars. Advocates of this theory adduce arguments for two languages, mixing two different notions — "the common language" and "the literary language" and denying the common Mari language.

The Mari common language is a fact, which does not require any special evidence. It has been proved long ago. We confine ourselves to the well-known statement that the common language is a living colloquial language of the nation with its dialectal differences. The literary language is the highest form of the language development, leaving all dialectal differences, popular speech and other forms. But they have one common basis — the totality of identical phonetic, grammar and lexical means which belong to the common Mari.

The contemporary language situation among the Mari lacks understanding of the necessity of the common national language. This is typical of the representatives of the hill Mari. That is why one of the most important tasks of Mari linguistics is to show the necessity of the language unity, which is vitally important for the Mari as a nation. The absence of language unity tampers national consolidation, hinders cultural development, splits the nation's spiritual strength and, therefore, diminishes its potential for expressing itself to a full extent. To solve this problem a certain national courage is necessary. I am not going to touch upon the problem here. It is a matter for another discussion.

The language situation in the Republic of Mari El is dual. On the one hand, there have been positive tendencies in solving language problems, the interest for the native language has been growing, some new opportunities for solving the problems have appeared. But on the other hand, the solution of many problems is impeded by inertness, indifference to the issues connected with the language, national nihilism reigning in the Mari society.

The language situation among the other Finno-Ugric people in Russia is analogous. It is the result of the official policy towards the so-called "small nations" during the period of stagnation. The problems are common and the line of attack on them may be the same.

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