TYPOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE VOLGAIC LANGUAGES

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The Volgaic languages - Mari or Cheremis and Mordvin - differ considerably, though they are traditionally regarded as being closely related. I shall here be considering them both as single linguistic entities, even though they do, according to the modern concept, consist of two separate (written) languages: Mordvin of Erzya and Moksha, and Mari of Western and Eastern Mari. They are, however, no longer assumed to have a common Volgaic proto-language. They share only a few words that do not occur in the other related languages, such as Mar. *muro* - Md. *moro* meaning 'song', Mar. *tošto* - Md. *tašto* 'old', Mar. *poŋgo* - Md. *paŋg o* 'mushroom'. Nor are there many common morphological elements that are missing from the other Finno-Ugric languages: the possessive suffix of the 3rd person singular Mar. *šo* - Md. *zo,* the possessive suffix of the 3rd person plural Mar. *št* - Md. *st* (the same suffixes also occur with the third person imperatives) and the infinitive sign Mar. *š* - Md. *s* (originally the lative suffix). These morphemes may also be the outcome of parallel development, for they are an example of the analogous use and combination of elements to be found in other related languages. (Cf. Finno-volžskaja obščnost' 1989: 17-19.)

It is nowadays assumed that the Early Proto-Finnic and the Volgaic languages had split apart by 1500 B.C. at the latest, possibly even earlier. And it was at about this period that the Volgaic languages parted company. The dispersion of the Finno-Volgaic proto-language did not of course take place in a moment; it was the result of extensive settlement (more uniform in some parts than in others) stretching from the Finnish mainland to the banks of the Volga, which began more and more to diverge both linguistically and culturally on the extreme peripheries. Later, too, the migration was at least from south to north, from the Volga

region to the Finnic areas, and undoubtedly in the opposite direction, too.

The difference between the Mari and the Mordvin languages has often been explained as the result of the influence from neighbouring languages. It is therefore in order to take a brief look at their history. The neighbouring languages with the strongest influence on Mari and Mordvin have been the Turkic languages and Russian. From the late 8th century onwards the Volga Bulgars extended their power into the Volga region. Some of the Finno-Ugric population in the area merged with them, and they all came under their domain, the Mordvins probably before the Mari. With the downfall of the Bulgar empire at the end of the 13th century, the region passed into the hands of the Tatars and remained thus until the Kazan khanate was overthrown in 1552. The linguistic influence of the Tatars in particular on the Mari language and to some extent on Mordvin nevertheless persisted right up to the present century, for their speakers inhabit the same areas. - However, from the 10th century onwards the Russian principalities also began to exert their influence on the Mordvins: some of the Mordvins were vassals to the Russians, some to the Bulgars. Following the downfall of the khanate the lands of both the Mordvins and the Maris came under Russian rule. (See Bereczki 1983: 207-208; Róna-Tas 1982: 125-126, 142; Osnovy 1975: 253-254; Osnovy 1976: 8-9.)

In Mordvin the Turkic influence was chiefly limited to vocabulary and amounts to a couple of hundred words, dialects included. The influence is stronger in Moksha than in Erzya. Mari has several hundred loan words of Bulgar, Chuvash and Tatar origin. The influence ot these languages is not restricted to vocabulary alone and is also evident in the phonetics, morphology and syntax, in e. g. the numerous borrowed bound morphemes and structures. - In Mordvin the Russian influence is particularly evident in the vocabulary, where words of Russian origin may account for a large proportion of certain texts, and in the syntax, where there is ample evidence of subordinate clauses beginning with Russian conjunctions. The Russian influence is less marked in Mari and is manifest chiefly in loan words.

Declension

Both Mari and Mordvin are basically agglutinative languages, like the Finno-Ugric languages in general, and they display little tendency towards fusion. Both have a rich system of cases: modern Mordvin grammars mention 12 cases (13 in Moksha) and Mari 9 (10 in Western Mari). There are similarities and differences in both the elements and the functions of the case systems of these languages. The use of the grammatical cases, the nominative, accusative, genitive and dative, is approximately similar in both Mari and Mordvin. In Mordvin the genitive and accusative endings have merged (as in Finnish), and the resulting genitive has acquired the functions of both cases. The datives in these languages have different historical origins.

Both Volgaic languages in principle have a tripartite system of local cases - a feature typical of many Finno-Ugric languages. In addition to the cases denoting fixed location there are others denoting movement from and to. Mari uses postpositions instead of the 'from' case. The system is not, however, infallible, for on the one hand the old separative case has been preserved in a non-productive form as a case attached to certain stems indicating place, and on the other hand the postposition makes up for the absence of a 'from' case and fulfills its functional place in the language. The inessive has the same origin in both Mari and Mordvin, and to some extent also the illative. One special feature of the Volgaic languages is the fact that they have two local 'to' cases, the illative and the lative. Their use in Mari and Mordvin is nevertheless quite different. In Mari the illative expresses movement towards something, whereas the lative is used in conjunction with verbs expressing not movement but appearing somewhere, being born to something. In Mordvin the illative is a normal 'to' case. On the one hand the choice of the lative in Mordvin is determined by the lexical properties of the noun to which the suffix is appended: the word must indicate a place, space, building or some other such institution to which an entity transfers. On the other hand the choice of lative is also influenced by the adjuncts of the noun in question and to some extent by the predicate verb. (Cf. Alhoniemi 1985: 50-52.) In othe words the choice of illative and lative depends in Mari on the nature of the verb, in Mordvin more on the properties of the noun to which the case ending is affixed.

Mordvin also has a fifth purely local case, prolative, that answers the question "by which route? via what?". The Mordvin declension further has ablative that is partly a grammatical case in function (i. e. it expresses e. g. the object in connection with certain material words and also occurs with certain quantifiers) and partly local (answers questions such as "from where?"), and translative acting as a predicative 'to' and 'being' case (expressing 'to become something' and 'to act in the capacity of').

There are in both Mari and Mordvin some further cases for expressing the way something is done (in the broader sense) and which thus generally appear in various adverbials expressing way, quantity, etc. In Mordvin these include comparative ("how big? how much?"), abessive ("without what?"), and in Moksha only causative ("what for? to achieve what?"), in Mari comparative ("in what way?"), comitative ("with what?") and in Western Mari only caritive ("without what?").

Both Mari and Mordvin have possessive declension using possessive suffixes to indicate the owner. In some Mordvin cases and dialects these suffixes are used to express not only the owner but whether one or more objects are owned. Possessive suffixes are used to express not only habitive relations but also e. g. the agent in various infinite constructions. In Mari their basic function is also to express the definiteness of the noun.

Mordvin has developed a definite declension all of its own. In it elements of clear demonstrative origin are appended to words as suffixes. The grammatical cases are formed synthetically in this declension by adding the case ending and the determinative element one after the other. In Moksha in particular, but in many Erzya dialects, too, these have, however, become so closely integrated that the border between the morphemes can no longer be recognised. This can be regarded as an indication of the archaic nature of the phenomenon. In the local cases of the definite declension Erzya, and Moksha in particular, uses both synthetic case endings and the separate postposition *ez* and the case ending, usually with a noun in the genitive case of the definite declension. The system constructed by means of postpositions to some extent differs functionally from the system constructed using synthetic cases (Alhoniemi 1982, 33-41). It cannot therefore be claimed that the postposition expressions - at least in the definite declension of Erzya - represent an analytical tendency to replace the synthetic cases; on the contrary, there is

more evidence of a tendency towards discrimination for different uses, the parallel existence of analytical and synthetic expressions, but (partly) in different functions.

Mari has lost the ancient Finno-Ugric *t* indicating plural in the declension of nouns. Instead it has assimilated such phonotactically awkward suffixes as *wlak, šam∂č,* which have developed out of independent words. The plural of nouns is often not indicated, so that the plurality of the subject referent, for example, is manifest only in the (personal) ending of the plural predicate, or in the plurality of the subject or object referent is evident from the frequentative suffix of the predicate, which, incidentally, is in the singular; or the plurality of the noun referent - especially in cases other than nominative - can be deduced only from the context. The fact that Mari does not indicate the plural of nouns is regarded as Turkic influence.

Nor is the plural of Mordvin nouns entirely free of problems: in the indefinite declension the plural can only be formed in the nominative; in the definite declension plural can be formed in all cases, in the local cases either synthetically or by means of a postposition in Erzya and by means of a postposition only in Moksha. At least the Moksha plural thereby loses the opposition indefinite-definite (Alhoniemi 1982, 41). Most often, however, the noun is already definite if, in the text, it appears in some plural case other than the nominative. The Mari and Mordvin use of the plural cannot therefore be compared, since in Mari the absence of a plural sign has nothing to do with the definiteness or indefiniteness of a noun.

In addition to a definite declension Mordvin has developed a predicative inflexion (or noun conjugation, as it is also called) that is unique as regards the other Finno-Ugric languages. Here the personal verbal endings are affixed to the predicative nominal predicates in particular but also to nominal predicates of other type; in the preterite the personal endings follow the *l'* originating from the verb 'to be' and indicating the past tense. For example, *ki-jan* 'who am I' (who-1SG), *ki-jat* 'who are you' (who-2SG), *son ki* 'who is he' (he who) or *škola-s-an* 'I am in school' (school-INESS-1SG), *škola-so* 'he is in school' (school-INESS), *škola-so-l'-iń* 'I was in school' (school-INESS-PRET1SG), *škola-so-l'-t'* 'they were in school' (school-INESS-PRET3PL). The endings of the predicative inflexion can also be attached after the definite or possessive suffixes, e. g. *miń t'ejt'eŕe-nze-l'-ńek* 'we were his daughters'

(we daughter-PX.PL3SG-PRET1PL). (Cf. Alhoniemi 1982b, 48-49.)

A similar conjugation of nouns is also possible in Samoyed and certain Turkic languages. However, it need not be considered a borrowing in Mordvin, for it is (like the definite declension) the (logical) consequence of a strong tendency towards synthesis.

Conjugation

Both Volgaic languages have a complex but widely differing system of conjugation. To begin with, Mari has two different conjugational schemes determined according to the vowel of the verb stem; in the I preterite, for example, the conjugations take different signs, and some of the personal endings are different, too. In both languages there are in addition to the present two (simple) past tenses, but their usage differs. In Mordvin the difference between the preterites lies in the duration or customary nature of the activity, whereas in Mari the criterion is whether the action was personally experienced or not. Using ossified forms of the verb 'to be' following the finite main verb but not as suffixes, Mari can construct four more periphrastic forms of past time to express the relationships between duration and chronology, personally experienced or reported action.

In addition to the indicative Mari has an imperative and a desiderative; in the same way as the periphrastic compound tenses I mentioned before, it is also possible to form a conditional. The Mordvin mood system is far richer: in addition to the indicative and imperative there is an optative giving a milder order, a conjunctive expressing condition, a conditional and a mood known to the grammarians as the conjunctive-conditional, and a desiderative; the conditional further has two different tenses. The mood signs come from independent words, such as the verb 'to be', but they have become bound morphemes and suffixes.

Both Volgaic languages have a negative verb that can be conjugated in most tenses and moods. The Mordvin present nevertheless uses a non-inflected negative adverb. In Western Mari the second preterite is formed by means of a suffix of caritive origin.

The biggest difference between the Mari and Mordvin verb systems is, however, the existence in Mordvin of an objective conjugation. This

expresses by means of personal suffixes not only the person of the subject but also the person of the object, unlike, for example, the Ugric languages, in which objective conjugation endings are used to express the definiteness or number of the object. The objective conjugation multiplies the number of finite verb forms; although some of the indicative forms are identical, the other moods partially adapt to the objective conjugation. The negative verb can also be inflected according to the objective conjugation. Historically the endings of the objective conjugation are explained as consisting of different elements indicating person, but these elements can no longer be broken down for they have become merged.

The Finno-Ugric languages do not have a morphological aspect category, in other words aspect cannot be expressed by means of affixation. Mari has - under the influence of the Turkic languages - developed an aspectual converb construction. This is a compound of a gerund and a predicate verb in which the predicate verb only expresses the aspect of the gerund verb and loses its own lexical meaning, e. g. *lüðǝn kajǝš* 'he was frightened' (fear-GER go-1PRET3SG), *eŋer joɣen šoɣa* 'the river flows' (river flow-GER stand-3SG). Although the emergence of the systematic aspect system was influenced by the neighbouring languages, the conditions in Mari were already favourable: it still uses word pairs made up of a gerund and a finite verb in which both verbs have retained their original meaning and thus stand in a temporal relationship to one another; there is a gradual transition from such word pairs to the other end of the scale, the purely aspectual construction.

Syntax

The original word order of the Finno-Ugric languages was presumably SOV (subject-object-verb). In Mari SOV is still the most common word order in the basic sentence. Any new information is placed immediately before the predicate so that in existential phrases, for example, the subject comes after the initial adverbial, just before the verb (ASV). In other respects, too, Mari observes the SOV order: the modifier usually precedes the head. - The Mordvin word order is said to be free. The most common

order in modern language is SVO. It admittedly appears from old folklore texts that SOV was once quite common too. Otherwise Mordvin observes the modifier-head order, the exception being the auxiliary verb, which is usually before the main verb.

Both Volgaic languages use participle phrases made up of infinitives, participles and gerunds instead of subsidiary clauses. These constructions can occupy almost any syntactic position.

Phrases can be linked together asyndetically, without conjunctions; their relationship is clear from the context. In this case the phrase expressing cause must precede that telling of the consequence; events must follow chronological order, etc. Mari has a few subordinating conjunctions indicating temporal and concessive relations. These are placed at the end of the subordinate clause, after the predicate, and since they are unstressed they are pronounced with the preceding verb. These subordinate clauses must always - in accordance with the SOV order - precede the main clause. In Mordvin the subordinate clause system, like the conjunctions appearing at the beginning of clauses, would appear to be a Russian loan. The position of subordinate clauses in the sentence is, like the word order, free, for the relationship between the subordinate and main clauses is expressed by means of conjunctions.

Summary

On comparing the Mari and Mordvin languages, we notice that two highly divergent functional systems have emerged from a common fund of (Finno-Ugric) elements. It would appear that Mordvin displayed a strong tendency towards synthesis at a very early stage. This affected both declension and conjugation: the result was the definite declension of nouns, the predicative inflexion of nouns, the rich system of verbal moods and the objective conjugation. The fact that these phenomena are old is indicated by the merging of the suffixes into entities in which the morpheme borders are no longer clearly distinguishable, and the spreading of these entities over a wide linguistic and geographical area split up into little pockets. (One typical feature of Mordvin is that there is no uniform linguistic system: each pocket of dialect constitutes its own functional system that cannot be generalised to apply to the entire

linguistic area.) It is, however, usually possible to distinguish the stem of a word from its suffixes, so this is a case of wearing down of the end of the word rather than a tendency towards fusion. The analytical tendency manifest in Mordvin syntax, its free word order and the use of subordinate clauses instead of infinitive constructions, are probably rather new phenomena resulting from the strong Russian influence of centuries past.

Mari likewise displays a certain degree of agglutination of independent words to assume the status of bound morphemes referring back to the preceding word. On the whole this is, however, sporadic and has not yielded entire systematic (inflection) categories as in Mordvin. In Mari it is usually easy to break compound suffixes down into parts, because they have not merged to become indivisible entities. Comparing Mari with the (hypothetical) proto-language from which both Mari and Mordvin have developed, we see that Mari does not seem to display any very marked changes applying to some sub-system. Evidence of the analytical tendency is the emergence of periphrastic tenses (and moods), expressed in Mordvin by synthetic means, likewise the development in Mari of an aspectual construction according to the Turkic model. Presumably the Turkic buffer likewise meant that the SOV order continued to dominate in Mari, whereas it has become freer in the other Finno-Volgaic languages.

Although the influence of neighbouring languages on the phonetics, morphology and syntax of the Volgaic languages cannot be denied, the major differences between Mordvin and Mari cannot be explained by the linguistic contacts known to scholars so far. The structural and functional differences between categories, likewise the numerous innovations in Mordvin morphology, would, in order to develop, require a much longer period than has passed since the start of, say, the Turkic contacts.

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