

Introduction

1. Background of the book

This volume is a collection of articles based on the papers presented at the seminar “Erzya language and culture in the field”, which took place in Helsinki on 18–19 November 2013. The seminar was organized by the Helsinki Area & Language Studies initiative (HALS), a community involving researchers working in a number of fields, including general linguistics, Finno-Ugric studies, Slavonic studies, Asian studies, and African and Middle-Eastern studies. The HALS initiative emerged as an offshoot of the LDHFTA (Linguistic Diversity: Historical, Functional and Typological Approaches) research community, which was assessed as among the most successful research clusters at the University of Helsinki in the International Evaluation of Research and Doctoral Training at the University of Helsinki 2005–2010. Currently active members of a steering group are Axel Fleisch, Ulla-Maija Forsberg, Riho Grünthal, Ekaterina Gruzdeva, Juha Janhunen, Jouko Lindstedt, Matti Miestamo, and Janne Saarikivi, as well as Stephan Schulz who coordinates a range of tasks in connection with HALS.

Based at the University of Helsinki, HALS aims to promote language studies that take into account linguistic diversity, language contact and historical linguistics, and which are thoroughly grounded in the cultural context of the speaker communities; research produced by HALS participants includes linguistic ethnographies, as well as language documentation and description. In the course of the last four years, HALS has been organizing a wide range of activities, such as field trips, conferences, teaching events coordinated by various departments, lectures by invited speakers, thematic workshops and intensive courses on languages that are not frequently taught in Helsinki.

An important aspect of HALS activities is the organization of annual field trips which bring together experienced researchers specializing in particular areas and students on different stages of their studies. During HALS field trips, students and researchers work on a range of topics individually or in small teams, which provides the chance to learn how to carry out fieldwork in a real-life environment. Throughout the stay, there is the opportunity to discuss results and challenges with fellow students and more advanced researchers in a confidential and collaborative atmosphere. The participants, therefore, gain substantial expertise as to linguistic fieldwork skills, while making a valuable contribution to the linguistic documentation and analysis of the target languages.

Seven out of fourteen articles presented in this volume are largely based on research results obtained during the first HALS field trip, to the Republic of Mordovia, in August 2013. The team representing the University of Helsinki was led by Riho Grünthal and Jack Rueter, while Elena Lomshina from the Mordovian State University in Saransk acted as a local organizer. The group also included researchers and students of various linguistic and cultural programs both from Helsinki and Saransk. The fieldwork was conducted in the surroundings of the regional centre Dubyonki (Erzya: Дубинька), and the smaller villages visited were Morga (Erzya: Морго), Kochkurovo (Erzya: Кочкур), Ardatovo (Erzya: Орданьбуе), Povodimovo (Erzya: Поводеле), Chindyanovo (Erzya: Кендя) and Kabayevo (Erzya: Кобале). The area was chosen for being representative of an Erzya-speaking society and relatively understudied if compared to some other parts of Mordovia.

During the trip, it became a routine after a breakfast of millet to board a small school bus of bright colours for one of the villages, where usually a traditional welcoming ceremony opened the day. Thus, the field interviews were often carried out amidst feasting and singing. The participants of the trip had a chance to meet Erzya-speaking people of different ages and social statuses. A large part of this book has its roots in the rich Mordovian soil, quite literally, since its writers have been collecting potatoes and beetroots alongside the cultural and linguistic data on the Erzya language.

The other seven articles included in this volume have been written by researchers of Mordvin languages and culture from Helsinki, Saransk, Saint Petersburg and Tartu, who participated in the November seminar. The volume presents many different perspectives on the study of the Mordvins, and the authors employ various theoretical and methodological approaches. It is noteworthy, however, that the majority of the articles are based on first-hand data, primarily collected in the field.

The authors were free to choose either of the two languages, English or Russian, for their contributions. All of the articles were peer-reviewed by two anonymous reviewers in order to guarantee the scientific quality of the series. The editors have, in most cases, preserved the terminological choices and the transcription of the Mordvin names in the English text. Thus, for instance, the name of Dubyonki district (*Дубёнский район*) can be transcribed in different ways throughout the volume.

2. Structure of the volume

The first three articles present the Dubyonki district from different aspects. The article by **Nina Kazaeva** provides an overview of the toponymy. Kazaeva analyzes phonetic and morphological dialectal features reflected in the geographical names of the district, and discusses the etymology of the toponyms, paying particular attention to those derived from Finno-Ugric and adapted Russian appellatives. She also suggests possible etymologies for several substrate toponyms attested in the region.

Merja Pikkarainen studies the language biographies of the residents of the Dubyonki district collected through semi-structured interviews, as well as people's attitudes towards the languages spoken in the district. Pikkarainen shows that the Erzya language has a fairly high prestige in the district, and it is transmitted to next generations by their parents and especially grandparents. As she argues, however, there also exist several factors that threaten the status of the language, such as massive migration of younger people out of the district.

Elena Lomshina's contribution is a survey of the Mordvin festive culture, primarily based on the field data collected in the Du-byonki and Zubovo-Poljana districts of the Republic of Mordovia. Lomshina relates the properties of the Mordvin rituals to the perception of time and space characteristic of the Erzya and Moksha people. She discusses the connection between feasts and myths, analyzing the cultural symbols and their representation in traditional games. The article also shows the recent development of the folk traditions and their place in the modern life.

The second part of the book is dedicated to dialectology. The contribution by **Ivan Rjabov** is a report on the current work related to creating the dialectological atlas of the Mordvin language varieties. Rjabov provides an overview of the recent achievements in this field, outlines the problems, and suggests possible directions for further development. The article is illustrated by several examples of dialectological maps, which are discussed in connection with the methodology of their design.

The article by **Jack Rueter** aims to develop research methods for establishing affinities between individually documented language materials and descriptions of the Erzya dialects. For this purpose, Rueter studies the isoglosses of several Mordvin phonological and morphological characteristics, and describes the views on Mordvin dialectal division. Erzya is assessed in its relation to Moksha as its Mordvinic counterpart. Rueter argues that identification of isoglosses will contribute to the already existing systematic classification of the Erzya language.

Nina Agafonova considers the classification of Erzya dialects in connection to one particular grammatical feature, namely the determinative suffix occurring in the nominal paradigm, and its variation. Agafonova discusses possible ways to express definiteness on the noun in Erzya varieties, based on the extensive dialectal data collected during numerous field trips. The proposed classification also makes a significant contribution to the study of case systems in Erzya dialectal varieties.

The next six articles are concerned with research on particular topics in phonetics and grammar of the Mordvin languages, as well as with the collection of data for such research. **Nadezhda Kabaeva**

studies the phonetic characteristics of the Moksha dialectal variety spoken in the village of Adashevo in the Republic of Mordovia. The article focuses primarily on the constriction of front vowels and the reduction of unstressed narrow vowels, as the main distinctive features of the variety. Kabaeva shows that both processes are to a large extent connected to accentuation. She also provides an overview of the consonantal system of the dialect, and compares the phonetics of the Adashevo variety to other Moksha dialects and the literary standard.

Merja Salo's article is a close-up study on the Erzya *-ńek/-nek* suffix expressing comitative meaning. The main question is whether this marker should be treated as a grammatical case ending or a derivational suffix. Salo compares the use of the *-ńek/-nek* suffix in Erzya to the corresponding suffixes in other Uralic languages, and presents new data collected during the field trip to the Dubyonki district. She shows that the Erzya suffixes traditionally referred to as comitatives behave similarly to associative markers in many languages.

The topic of **Maria Kholodilova**'s contribution is non-verbal predication in Moksha. Kholodilova gives a general overview of the morphological and syntactic properties of conjugated non-verbal predicates, and compares them to verbs and non-verbs. She also investigates the conditions that regulate the use of verbal markers on non-verbal predicates, and discusses non-predicative uses of verbal marking. Finally, the field data on Moksha collected by the author is compared to the existing descriptions of Erzya.

The article by **Rigina Ajanki** and **Anna-Maria Kangastus** is concerned with subject person indexation in Erzya, especially with the cases of cross-indexing, that is co-occurrence of free and bound person indices in one clause. Ajanki and Kangastus aim to determine the factors that affect the employment of cross-indexing. They argue that cross-indexed subjects are an indicator of importance in the discourse. It is also discovered that cross-indexing is more common in spoken language or in written texts representing the spoken language, which is in line with the typological observations regarding subject indexation.

Riho Grünthal examines the domain of transitivity in Erzya spoken as a second language. Grünthal's questionnaire included

transitive clauses representing patterns of both high and low transitivity, and the data was collected during the field trip to the Dubyonki district. The study shows that non-native speakers of Erzya adopt transitivity as a system involving both nominal and verbal inflection. However, the overall variation among the answers of individual non-native speakers is much greater than among the answers of those speaking Erzya as their first language.

Heini Arjava experimented with three-dimensional elicitation method during the HALS field trip, and her contribution discusses methodological issues in the study of spatial expressions. Arjava argues that toy settings of static and dynamic situations are a good way to avoid interference from a metalanguage and enable quasi-spontaneous, speaker-focused answers. The article also presents several case studies, which provide valuable information on the spatial map of modern Erzya, as well as on the linguistic choices made by people of different ages and backgrounds.

Finally, the fourth part of the volume comprises two studies in the field of language contact. The article by **Boglárka Janurik** examines the structure of intrasentential code-switches in bilingual Erzya–Russian discourse. Janurik argues that the occurrence of the different code-switching types depends on the degree of congruence between Erzya and Russian structures. She explains the variation of code-switching types referring to both the models used in the grammatical analysis of intrasentential code-switches, as well as pragmatically oriented approaches.

The contribution by **Ksenia Shagal** is concerned with the peculiarities of the Russian language spoken by the Erzya community in the Dubyonki district. The study focuses on those grammatical phenomena that she suggests can be explained by the influence of the mother tongue of the Erzya people on their Russian speech, and further discusses the possible mechanisms of their emergence. Shagal thus demonstrates how a local variety of Russian reflects structural features of Erzya, as manifested in recurring deviations from the standard Russian in the speech of bilingual individuals.

3. Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the people and institutions whose support made the publication of this book possible.

The field trip to Mordovia in August, as well as the subsequent seminar in November, was generously sponsored by HALS, so we would like to thank all those who are responsible for obtaining funding for these great events.

Our sincere thanks goes to all the researchers and lecturers who shared their knowledge and experience with the students during the preparations for the field trip in the spring semester of the academic year 2012/2013. We are especially grateful to Olga Yerina, who taught an introductory course in Erzya intended for all those who had little previous experience with the language.

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to the trip organizers, both from Helsinki and from Saransk, who made the weeks in Mordovia such an unforgettable experience. Of course, we are also extremely grateful to all the wonderful people who welcomed us in Mordovia, our patient and devoted language consultants and everyone else who helped us in working and experiencing the culture to the fullest.

This book could have never appeared without the help from the anonymous reviewers, who carefully read the earlier versions of the articles and commented on them. The valuable insights they provided helped the authors improve the texts and raised the overall quality of the volume. We are also indebted to the proofreaders, Stephen Jones, Don Killian, Andrew Logie, Daniel Quayle, Ollie Sayeed and Elysia Warner. It is a pleasure to work with people who do their job so thoughtfully and efficiently.

Finally, we are particularly grateful to Jouni Harjumäki, a former coordinator of HALS, who took part in working on this book during its early stages and undertook many other important tasks ensuring HALS continued success.