

Language and Nature in Meadow Mari

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URALIC LANGUAGES

F Finno-Ugric

FO Baltic-Finnic

- FO1 Finnish
- FO2 Karelian
- FO3 Veps
- FO4 Ingrian
- FO5 Estonian
- FO6 Votic
- FO7 Livonian

FS Sami languages

- FS1 Western Sami
- FS2 Central Sami
- FS3 Eastern Sami

FU Ugric

- FU1 Hungarian
- FU2 Mansi
- FU3 Khanty

FP Finno-Permic

- FP1 Komi-Zyrian
- FP2 Komi-Permyak
- FP3 Udmurt

FW Finno-Volgaic

- FW1 Mari
- FW2 Mordvinic

S Samoyedic

SN Northern Samoyedic

- SN1 Nenets
- SN2 Enets
- SN3 Nganasan

SS Southern Samoyedic

- SS1 Selkup



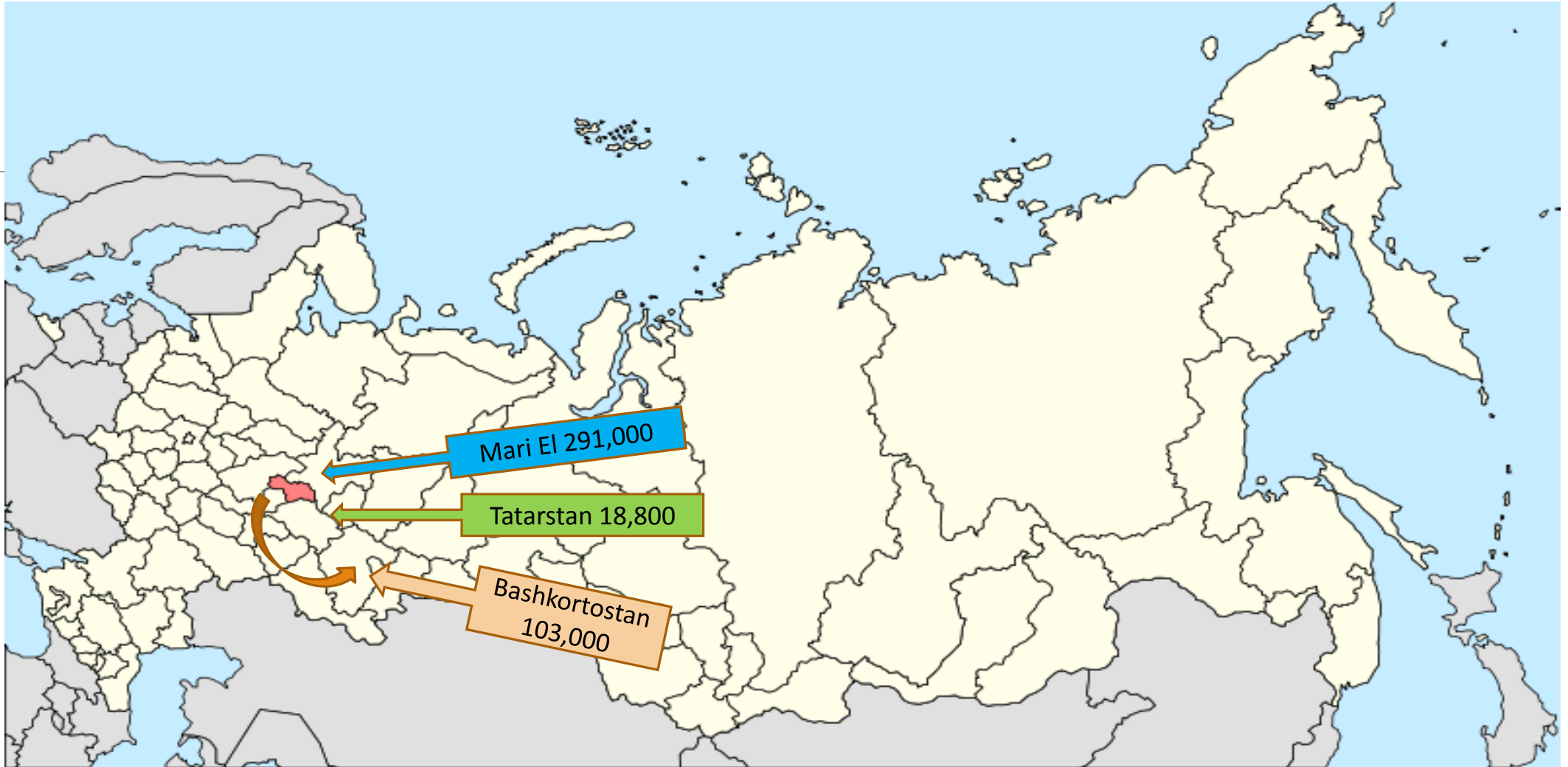
Map: Maximilian Dörrbecker



Who speaks Mari?

- Two main dialects, Meadow Mari and Hill Mari
- Total of about 413,000 speakers in Russian Mari El Republic plus a large diaspora in Bashkortostan and Tatarstan
- 2010 All-Russia population census: 547,605 identified as ethnic Mari, 67% identified as speakers of Meadow Mari and 3,062 (0.6%) identified as speakers of Hill Mari
- UNESCO Red Book of Endangered Languages (2002 census): Hill Mari is classed as “severely endangered”; Meadow Mari is classed as “definitely endangered”.
- Mari language.com
- [A clip in Mari about Mari language summer school](#) (1:15)





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Čimarij jüla: Mari traditional religion

- ❖ Around a third of ethnic Maris practice *čimarij jüla*
- ❖ Combines elements of animism and totemism with worship of up to 100 deities and personified supernatural beings related to nature, agriculture and domestic life (Glukhova 2011)
- ❖ Now undergoing a “neopagan” revival



Čimarij jüla: Mari traditional religion

❖ Prayers to gods are held in sacred groves (küsoto); it is forbidden to chop down the trees there.



- ❖ Kugu Jumo, the great leader of gods
- ❖ Mlande, Earth
- ❖ Küdryrchö, thunder
- ❖ Volgenchö, lightning
- ❖ Tul, fire
- ❖ Uzhara, sunrise
- ❖ Shudyr-Shamych, stars
- ❖ Tütyra, fog/mist
- ❖ Kinde Shochyn, rye harvest
- ❖ Saska, fruit, fertility
- ❖ Perke, abundance
- ❖ Agun kugyzha, the spirit of the barn
- ❖ Keremet, the force of evil

Čimarij jüla: Mari traditional religion

- ❖ Only those who speak Mari are allowed to participate in ceremonies in the sacred grove (www.rferl.org)
- ❖ Prayers to traditional deities contain a number of linguistic devices to aid memory in an oral culture, including alliteration and repetition (Glukhova 2011)
- ❖ Show a complex relationship with the natural world, where some aspects of nature are viewed as a danger to survival:

Osál mardež gýčyn, ßüđ gýčyn sakly kélgy korém gýčyn, laßrá gýčyn arály, čylá türl'y osál gýčyn, tušmán gýčyn, osál šinžá gýčyn, lóktyzy gýčyn, píre [wolf] gýčyn, maská [bear] gýčyn i čylá türl'y osál kaik gýčyn saklo!

Protect our cattle from an evil wind, guard against deep ravine, against mud, save from any evil, from the enemies, from an evil eye, from the bears, from all other wild beasts!

(Glukhova 2011:63)

Nature in the grammar: Mari Causatives

- 4 causative affixes: **-kt**, **-t/-d**, **-ar**, **-tar/-dar** with varying degrees of productivity (cf Japanese)
- Traditional Mari grammars treat **-kt** as a voice marker and **-t/-d** as derivational.
- Both **-kt** and **-t/-d** can attach to 2-argument verbs with a dative causee:

(1) Myj tud-lan vüd-ym numal-**t**-em.
I he-DAT water-ACC bring-CAUS.1SG.PRS
'I make him bring water'

(2) Ava-že üdyr-žy-lan kočkyš-ym pogy-**kt**-yš
Mother-Px3SG daughter-Px3SG-DAT meal-ACC gather-CAUS-PST1.3SG
'Mother made her daughter lay the table'

Causatives

For –kt, the causee can be implicit but the referent is **human**:

- (3) Užga-m urgy-**kt**-em.
fur coat-ACC sew-CAUS-PRS.1s
'(I) make (a tailor) sew a fur coat' / '(I'm) having the fur coat sewed (by someone)'
- (4) Ača-že pört-yš sairak signalizacij-ym purty-**kt**-yš.
father-Px.3SG house-ILL better alarm-ACC bring in-CAUS-3SG.PST1
'His/her father made (someone) set a better alarm system in the house'

Causatives

-t/-d causatives do not share this property:

(5) Myj tud-lan vüd-ym numal-**t**-em.
I he-DAT water-ACC bring-CAUS.1SG.PRS
'I make him bring water'

(6) *Myj vüd-ym numal-**t**-em.
I water-ACC bring-CAUS.1SG.PRS
Intended: 'I make someone bring water'

(7) Myj vüd-ym numal-**ty-kt**-em
I water-ACC bring-CAUS.1SG.PRS
'I make someone bring water'

Causatives

More evidence of an animacy constraint; the same verb forms a causative with a different affix depending on the animacy (+/- human) of the causee:

- (8) Rveze šoryk-ym (kuryk gyč) pokt-en **vol-t-yš**
boy sheep-ACC (mountain=from) chase-3SG.PST 2 go down-3SG.PST 1
'The boy made the **sheep** go down (the mountain)'
- (9) Ava-že ergy-žy-m ušenge gyč **voly-kt-yš**
mother-Px3SG son-Px3SG-ACC tree from go down-CAUS-3SG.PST 1
'The mother made her **son** climb down the tree'

Causatives



In a class of transitives, **-kt is used with natural forces**

(10) Jüštö igeče enjery-m kylmy-**kt**-en (*kylm-t-en)
cold weather **river**-ACC freeze-CAUS-PST2.3SG
'The cold weather made the river freeze.'

(11) Keče ij-ym levy-**kt**-en.
sun **ice**-ACC melt-CAUS-PST2.3SG
'The sun melted the ice'

(12) Keče yry-**kt**-a.
Sun heat-CAUS.3SG.PRS
'The sun heats'

(13) Keče myj-ym yry-**kt**-a.
Sun I-ACC heat-CAUS.3SG.PRS
'The sun heats me'.

Conclusion

Mari traditional religion reflects a close but complex relationship to nature and natural forces

This is reflected in language:

- ❖ Only speakers of Mari may participate in ceremonies
- ❖ Mari prayers are made to many deified natural forces
- ❖ Prayers may describe a view of natural forces as a danger
- ❖ Natural forces may be “personified” at the grammatical level



www.rferl.org

Thanks to...

Gerson Klumpp

Members of the Uralic Syntax research group