

HILL MARI FIELD (TEAM PROJECT OF OTIPL MSU)*

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The talk focuses on a team fieldwork project led by the author at Moscow State University, Department of Theoretical and Applied Linguistics (OTIPL MSU) since 2016. It deals with the Eastern subdialects of Hill Mari spoken in the village of Kuznetsovo and in some neighbouring villages (in particular, Apshak-Pelyak, Kukshilidy, Kozhlananger, Nikishkino, Paulkino, Tyumanovo, Yashpatrovo), Mari El Republic, Russia¹. I will describe the main results achieved so far, provide some sociolinguistic characteristics of the subdialects in question (see Kuklin 2010; Yazyk i obshchestvo 2016: 268–272, 746–752; Shabykov, Kudryavtseva 2017 on the general situation with Mari), and discuss how the fieldwork methods we have chosen can be used under the given sociolinguistic conditions.

The project team has adopted the collective approach to fieldwork introduced in Kibrik 1972, 2005. We rely on both elicitation and analysis of texts recorded and transcribed in fieldwork. The research focus is put on Hill Mari grammar and lexical semantics. I will present a website on which our results are available.

Hill Mari is the main language of everyday communication in the area where we carry out our fieldwork. However, it is involved in a changing situation of interaction between several languages. Many younger speakers shift to Russian (although they still can speak Hill Mari). At the same time, the local variety of Russian is influenced by Hill Mari, which results in grammatical and lexical calques. As is well-known (see e. g. Fedotov 1990), Hill Mari has a long-lasting contact with Chuvash. According to the survey we have conducted, nowadays most of Hill Mari speakers do not know Chuvash. At the same time some speakers mentioned that their parents and grandparents had spoken Chuvash due to mixed marriages, trade etc.

One more language variety which influences the subdialects under consideration is Standard Hill Mari. It is familiar to all of our consultants and was taught at school at least up to the first half of 2018 (further situation rapidly changes because of an amendment in Russian legislation). Some of our consultants studied Standard Hill Mari and / or Standard Meadow Mari in the system of higher education.

Our work raises some methodological issues, which will be illustrated with language examples in the talk: interaction between elicitation and corpus studies; proportion of fully spontaneous and experiment-based texts in the corpus; interpreting elicited data from more literate and less literate consultants; working with Russian stimuli and responses during elicitation etc.

References

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* The work has been supported by RFBR (project № 19-012-00627 carried out at Moscow State University).

¹ There are two official languages in the Mari El Republic: Meadow Mari and Hill Mari. They belong to the Uralic family. Some sources treat them as the varieties of one Mari language.

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