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Chuvash Syntactic Nominalizers

On **-ki* and its Counterparts in Ural-Altaic Languages

2011

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

ISSN 0177-4743
ISBN 978-3-447-06581-8

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Acknowledgements

I wish to express my gratitude to the following persons who have helped me in the research work: Nina Agafonova, Eduard Fomin, Hatice Kütük, Sergey Maksimov, Mansur Saykhunov, Judit Varga and Dmitriy Yefremov. Many lines of thought that have been pursued in this work have their origin in the inspiring discussions with my supervisor in Altaistic studies, Prof. Juha Janhunen (University of Helsinki). I should also like to thank Prof. Sirkka Saarinen and other personnel of the Department of Finno-Ugric Languages (University of Turku), who have created an atmosphere where it is easy to concentrate on long-term research. My wife Sinikka has gently but firmly supported me in the hard stages of the work.

Turku, 30th August 2011, Jorma Luutonen

1 Introduction

The starting point of this study was my feeling of perplexity when encountered with certain suffixal forms of Chuvash that I found strange. These include such forms as *vărman-t-i* 'the one (being) in the forest' (forest-LOC-*i*), where the locative case form *vărman-ta* 'in the forest' has been further modified by the suffix *-i* (whereby the *a* of the locative ending is deleted). In Modern Chuvash grammars, this suffix *-i* is called выделительный аффикс 'distinctive affix, distinguishing affix', and the corresponding grammatical category has been named категория выделения 'category of distinction'[1]. There are actually three different suffixal elements which are treated under this category denomination in Chuvash. In addition to the above-mentioned *-i*, the two others are *-χi* and *-sker*, e.g. *pajan-χi* 'the one pertaining to this day, today's' (today-*χi*); *vula-nă-sker* 'such a one who has read' (read-PST.PTCP-*sker*).

The Chuvash elements *-i* and *-χi* can etymologically be connected to a suffix in other Turkic languages which typically appears as *-ki*, e.g. Turkish *orman-da-ki* 'the one (being) in the forest' (forest-LOC-*i*). The same suffix is also found in the Mongolic languages, e.g. Written Mongol *usun-da-ki* 'the one (being, living) in the water' (water-DAT/LOC-*ki*). Chuvash differs, however, from all the other Altaic languages in two respects: it has three suffixes instead of two, and the functional range of the Chuvash element *-i* is much wider than that of Common Turkic-Mongolic *-ki*.

The writers of Chuvash grammars have had difficulties in deciding where the suffixal morphemes in question should be described. The suffixes *-i* and *-χi* have most frequently been treated among adjectival derivational endings, but even a superficial analysis of the grammatical contexts where they are used reveals that they are no ordinary derivational elements: they can be attached to inflectional forms, and their functions can often be regarded as syntactic, rather than pertaining to the formation of new lexemes. The place of the *-sker* element in grammar varies considerably: in an early grammar by N. I. Ashmarin (1898), it was allotted a general structural role in forming the so-called third form of adjective, but later scholars have either treated it as an enclitic particle or grouped it together with *-i* and *-χi* as a marker of the 'category of distinction'.

Chuvash scholars have written fairly extensively on these unusual morphemes of their language, and some of the publications on the theme display remarkable

1 I will always give the name 'category of distinction' between quotation marks, because I do not consider it successful in every respect. On the other hand, 'distinctive suffix' and 'suffix of distinction' are, in my opinion, entirely adequate denominations for an individual suffix, and therefore they, as well as 'form of distinction', are used without quotes in the text (cf. Sergeyev 2002: 125). Note also that the word 'suffix' is often used in the text as a general term referring to all kinds of suffixal morphemes, including enclitics.

profundity. For instance, I. A. Andreyev's (1966) and I. P. Pavlov's (1985) articles contain many important observations of the syntactic and textual role of the forms, and V. I. Sergeyev's (2002) monograph on the Chuvash morphology includes about twenty pages of discussion on this subject. In spite of these advances, there remain many interesting questions to be resolved and largely neglected paths of investigation to be pursued. Some of them are described briefly in the following.

There are only qualitative studies on the morphemes *-i*, *-χi* and *-sker*, and thus any statistical observations on the basis of extensive text material are lacking.

Although the distinctive suffixes have been discussed by many Chuvash scholars and in considerable depth, there seems to be no consensus on the nature of these morphemes, a fact which is reflected, for example, in the critical tone of Sergeyev's (2002: 120–133) treatment of the findings of other researchers. This lack of a generally accepted outlook on the matter is also likely to be one reason for the fact that the Chuvash school books' presentation of the morphemes in question as derivational endings reflects a clearly outdated view (cf. Sergeyev 2002: 120).

The efforts to give generalized functional definitions to the *-i* and *-sker* morphemes by Chuvash scholars have sometimes led to rather complex formulations, which appear unnatural. This makes one to ponder whether the real meaning and role of these elements has actually been adequately conceived. Could not the definitions be more concise, and are all the semantic nuances attributed to the morphemes really their own properties, rather than epiphenomenal traits derivable from typical recurring contexts?

The questions that arise from the comparisons of Chuvash with other Altaic languages are: firstly, through what kind of historical development has Chuvash acquired its three morphemes, and, secondly, how are these elements functionally related to their counterpart(s) in other Altaic languages? Though Chuvash scholars often compare individual suffixes of distinction to elements in other Turkic and Altaic languages, no general picture of the development of this suffix class has been sketched. A peculiar complicating factor in the study of the distinctive suffixes is connected with the contemporary Chuvash grammatical tradition, which does not usually recognize the role of the 3rd p. possessive suffix as a marker of definiteness, a function familiar from other Turkic languages. This has resulted in the definite possessive suffix being ignored as a possible factor in explaining the development of the distinctive suffixes.

Chuvash linguists have successfully applied the contact linguistic approach only in the case of the *-sker* element. Other areal linguistic considerations that can be found in the literature are rather vague or otherwise unconvincing. A broader view of the role of language contacts in the development of the distinctive suffixes is therefore missing. Moreover, language typology has been applied to the phenomenon only on an elementary level: the writers usually state that the existence of the forms of distinction is connected with the agglutinative nature of Altaic morphology, but they do not put forward any hypotheses about the relation of these forms with other specific typological properties of languages.

The aim of this monograph is to investigate the suffixes *-i*, *-χi* and *-sker* on different levels of linguistic structure and from several viewpoints. The study is both qualitative and quantitative, synchronic and diachronic, and it also includes areal linguistic and typological considerations. I will try to give some kind of an answer to all the questions described above, to take stand on the unresolved issues, to reinterpret the results of others, if needed, and to present better, more consistent and accurate data where it is lacking. Finally, an interpretation of the true nature of these morphemes will be given. The focus in the treatment of the subject will be on morphology and comparisons between different languages. A more detailed description of the syntactic role of the suffixes will be left outside this study. The theoretical framework is mainly that of traditional grammar, with some influences from discourse analysis.

The first version of this monograph was a Master's thesis (2010) in the discipline of Altaistics at the University of Helsinki, and it was written in Finnish. The supervisor of the work was Prof. Juha Janhunen.

The statistical data have been acquired using The Turku Chuvash Corpus (TChC), version 1.0, which contains about 1.24 million words in texts of varying content. I have had the opportunity to work with informants who speak Chuvash, Turkish, Tatar, Udmurt and Erzya-Mordvin as their mother tongue. The informants are sometimes referred to by the codes I1, I2, I3, I4 and I5 in the text, and their years and places of birth can be found at the end of the study.

The transcription applied here in most places is the Turcological notation explained, for instance, in the handbook The Turkic Languages edited by L. Johanson and É. Á. Csató (1998: xviii–xix). In examples from Common Turkic languages, the original orthography of the source has usually been preserved, but all examples written in Cyrillic orthography have been transliterated into the Turcological notation. Modern Chuvash is written in a nearly phonemic Cyrillic orthography, which means that most of the native Chuvash words shown in this work are practically letter by letter transliterations from Cyrillic into Latin characters. The examples from Finno-Ugric languages have been written in the Finno-Ugric Phonetic Alphabet (FUPA). The following differences compared with the Turcological notation (TN) can be found in the examples: FUPA *j* ~ TN *y*, FUPA *ɟ* ~ TN *ï*, FUPA *ə* ~ TN *ĕ*, FUPA *ə̂* ~ TN *ă*.

The symbol *-KI* is used to refer to all morphemes and allomorphs that etymologically correspond to the Modern Turkish *-ki* morpheme. Other symbols of this kind are explained when they are first used, and the reader can also find most of them in the list of symbols at the end of the monograph.

In the following, I will first create a background for understanding the peculiarities of the Chuvash *-KI* morpheme by describing the corresponding element in the Common Turkic languages. As Modern Turkish is likely to be the most familiar language to most readers, I will begin with it.