AREAL FEATURES IN THE VOLGA-KAMA REGION:
ON SOME NON-LEXICAL TURKIC INFLUENCES IN MORDVIN

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Summary

In this paper a number of similarities between Turkic languages and Mordvin languages Erzya and Moksha are described. Where earlier research concerning Turkic-Mordvin language contact has mostly focused on the lexical domain, this paper will describe a number of characteristics in other areas of grammar, such as phonology, functional syntax and morphology. The aim of this paper will be to reveal new insights into the extent of the Turkic influence on Mordvin, a language contact situation which by some scholars is seen as peripheral.

1. Introduction

This paper will address some non-lexical influences of Turkic languages in the Mordvin languages Erzya and Moksha.

The Mordvin languages are spoken in an area of European Russia south of the Oka and Volga rivers. Only a third of the total number of speakers live in their titular republic, while the remaining speakers are dispersed over villages and cities, mostly to the north, south and east of the republic.

From the end of the first millennium A.D. Mordvin has been in contact with Turkic languages. At first the main influence was exerted by Turkic of the so-called Bolgar type, which is currently only represented by Chuvash. After the Mongol invasion, at the start of the 13th century, this influence shifted to Tatar. After the 16th century, Russian became the dominant contact language, but in some language pockets Mordvins are still in direct contact with Tatar, Bashkir or Chuvash speakers.

Although until recently the etymology of the lexicon and analysis of its rich morphology have received most attention in Mordvin linguistics, there have been a number of grammatical treatises with special attention to syntax as well, most importantly the works by Koljadenkov (1954-1962) and to a lesser extent the work on Mordvin grammar edited by Cygankin (1980). These books were a major source of information for later grammars published in Hungarian, Finnish, and Estonian, such as the works by Keresztes (1990), Pall (1996) and Bartens (1999).

The area of contact linguistics is predominantly represented by loan word research, and the bulk of this research focused on finding elements of Turkic origin in the Mordvin lexicon.
1.1 The Volga-Kama language contact area

From the beginning of the 1960s onwards several scholars, such as Serebrennikov (1960, 1972) and Helimskij (1979: 129-130), developed the idea that the area around the confluences of the Oka, Volga and Kama form a special linguistic contact area. More recently, scholars such as Axmet'janov (1981, 1989), Bereczki (1983, 1984, 2003), Wintschalek (1993), and Johanson (1992) produced a number of articles and monographs on linguistic contacts between Turkic and Finno-Ugric languages, identifying a number of major characteristics of this linguistic contact area (see Helimski 2003: 159-160 for an overview).

The Volga-Kama river basin is an area where Turkic and Finno-Ugric languages have been in contact for well over a millennium. However, Mordvin is usually seen as one of the peripheral participants of this intra-linguistic exchange. Some scholars included Mordvin material in their research, such as Bereczki and Helimski, whereas others, most notably Wintschalek (1993: 49), who wrote a monograph on this particular subject, scarcely mention Mordvin. This is in part because a number of characteristics considered important for this language area (for example a dedicated construction for evidentiality) are missing in Mordvin, but also because the centre of this contact area is currently located at quite a distance away from their central living area. This is undoubtedly the result of historical factors, such as the fall of Kazan, which led to an eastward shift of the central area of contact over time.

1.2 The extent of the Turkic influence on the Mordvin lexicon

Although the extent of the Turkic influence on Mordvin is considered to have been less than, for example, the mutual influences between Chuvash and Mari, there are strong indications that it was at some point strong enough to go beyond the stage of lexical influence.

The Turkic influence on the Mordvin lexicon was extensively researched already in the nineteenth century by Paasonen, who published his well-known monograph on Turkic loanwords in Mordvin in 1898. He recorded over 190 loanwords from either Bolgar-Turkic or Tatar origin, although he chose to leave out loanwords that could be either of Turkic or Russian origin. After this specific monograph, the subject was only treated in a handful of minor articles, which were summarised in a more general article on linguistic contacts between Turkic and Fenno-Ugric languages by Róna-Tas (1988: 766).

In 2005 the second monograph on Turkic loanwords in Mordvin was published by Butylov. This work is largely based on Russian sources, which is useful for some more recent ideas on specific etymologies. However, quite a number of these new etymologies are uncertain and lack convincing argumentation. Furthermore, the book fails to connect with modern linguistic developments, especially with reference to a number of important recent