

On the Erzya and Moksha Languages

Two distinct but nearly mutually intelligible languages of
the Volga Region

What do the Erzya and Moksha speak

- * (1) Language identification
- * (2) Language documentation
- * (3) Language usage and development
- * (4) Open-source and the Digi Era

(1.) Language Identification

- * A few questions to ask:
 - * Does anyone speak it?
 - * Is it associated with a navy?
 - * Is the Language documented
 - * Does it have a literature?

Does anyone speak it?

- * Does anyone speak Mordvinic?

No! “I’ve never met a young Moksha or Erzya mother who would have spoken Mordvinic to their children; they always speak Moksha or Erzya.” (Aleksandr Pudín, Mokshan poet)

- * (How many people do you know who speak Romance? French, Spanish, Catalan... are all Romance languages.)

What is the ethnic make-up?

- * Ethnos documentation for Mordvinic stock
 - * 1926 Census: 2/3 Erzya and 1/3 Moksha (apparently no subsequent census has given this question)
 - * (See Yermushkin 2004: 4; cf. Fournet 2011: 35)

Is there a naval association?



Is the language documented?

- * The first grammars of Moksha and Erzya appeared in 1838 (Moksha) and 1838-39 (Erzya).

Does it have a literature?

- * The New Testament was published Erzya in the 1820s (the Gospel in 1821, and the remainder in 1827).
- * The Gospel was translated into Moksha in 1879 (Ethnologue)
- * Oral tradition published in the early 1880s
- * Popularization of the languages in the Soviet Era

(3) 1883

VI. Патять ялаксть.

Тейтернетъ цѣринеть, патять ялаксть, тустъ
виревъ пештенъ кочкамо. Сынъ вирэсть ёмасть.
Вешнеть, вешнеть ки, эзь мукъ. Вана састъ сынъ
ве кудыне ваксъ. Те кудосонтъ эрясь яга-баба.
Яга-баба саинзе сынсть да кониксъ пекстынзе.
Тозо каясь повдо пешть и мерсъ тенсть: не пеш-
тнеде ярсадо, эйдинемъ, куялгадомазонкъ.

2013

Патят-ялакст.

Тейтернеть-цёрынеть, патят-ялакст, тусть вирев
пештень кочкамо. Сынъ виресэнтъ ёмасть. Вешнеть,
вешнеть ки, эзть муе. Вана састь сынъ ве кудыне
вакс. Те кудосонтъ эрясь яга-баба. Яга-баба саинзе
сынст ды коникс пекстынзе. Тозонь каясь пондо
пештть и мерсть тенст: не пешттнеде ярсадо,
эйдинень, куялгадомазонк...

Sister and Brother

A girl and a boy, brothers and sisters, went into the forest to pick nuts. In the forest they got lost. They looked and looked for a path, but they didn't find any. Well, they came up to a little house. There was an old witch living in the house. The witch took them and locked them under the floor boards. She threw in a pood of nuts and said: eat these nuts, my children, till you get fat...

(2) Language Documentation

- * “Mordvin” word lists:
 - * Nicolaes Witsen ([1692] 1705), Strahlenberg (1730), Damaskin (1785) and Pallas (1787-89), etc.
- * Early published texts: translations and original:
 - * Erzya New Testament 1820s; Moksha Gospel 1870s; Literature 1880s
- * Grammar work begins in late 1830s:
 - * Ornatov (Russia 1838), Gabelentz (Germany 1838-39), Ahlqvist (Finland 1859, 1861), Wiedemann (Estonia 1865), Budenz (Hungary 1869), Paasonen (Finland 1903, 1909), Shakhmatov (Russia 1910), Evseyev (Russia 1928-29)
- * Extensive field work begins in early 1880s: Paasonen
- * Extensive popularization of two written languages in the beginning of the 1920s:
 - * News media, hygiene enlightenment pamphlets, schoolbooks, fiction, poetry

Distinguishing the Mordvinic Languages

- * (1) Distinctive word stems
- * (2) Word-final vowel reduction
- * (3) The [e] ≠ [ä] distinction
- * (4) Possessor indices
- * (5) Object conjugation

Distinctive word stems

- * There are distinctive word stems for the language forms
 - * Moksha has about 260 Turkic stems not attested in Erzya proper
 - * (The Shoksha dialects, an enclave located in the west, have much in common with Moksha, cf. Feoktistov 1990)
 - * About 41% of the entries in the 2703 page “Mordwinisches Wörterbuch (1990-1996)” feature shared word stems. (Rueter 2010)

Vowel reduction

- * Word-final vowel reduction is not attested in **modern literary Erzya**
- * Published media from the 1920s and 1930 indicate strong Erzya dialect tendencies for reduced vowels
- * (consult: <http://uralica.kansalliskirjasto.fi>)

The [e] ≠ [ä] Distinction

- * The [e] ≠ [ä] distinction is informative
 - * Both languages have dialects with these 2 vowels
 - * English distinguishes the two vowels, too, but no one claims them to be shared phonemes (cf. most recently Maticsak 2013:116)
 - * NB! Etymologically the phenomena is clear:
Erzya [e] = Moksha[ä] and
Erzya[ä] = Moksha[e]

Possessor index and definite marker look-alikes

- * Possessor index and definite marker look-alikes are confusing in the languages
 - Erzya([-ŋk]+Pl2)=Moksha([-ŋk]+Pl1);
 - Erzya([-ńt']+DefSg; [-ńt']-nt]+Dial+Sg2)=Moksha([-nt]+Pl2);
 - Erzya([-t|-t']+Sg2)=Moksha([-t']+DefSg)
- * Erzya has 9-10 cases with definite and possessor marking
- * Moksha has 3 cases with definite and possessor marking
- * Marking strategies are overlapped but not entirely shared

Object conjugation

- * Object conjugation
- * Erzya and Moksha are funny languages:
- * The verbs can have subject and direct object agreement marking
 - * À la Ornatov: [*kalmatan*] “je t’enterre”
(Repetitive, frequentative, etc.)
 - * À la Ahlqvist: [*palatan*] “je t’embrasse”
- * Overlapping but not entirely shared morphology

(3) Language Usage and Development

- * The Erzya norm adheres closely to the orthography used in the 1880s (Rueter 2010:)
- * Oscillation between phonematic and phonetic spelling
- * Reduction of use in the schools 1960-70s to native language instruction
- * Resurgence in the early 1990s

It's the Digi Era. Do minority languages, like Moksha and Erzya, have a chance

- * **FUNDING** with a purpose
- * **ATTITUDE**
- * **RESOURCES**
- * **EDUCATION**

FUNDING with a purpose

- * Kone Foundation “Language Programme” 2013-2016
 - * Digitization of various 1920-1930 media
 - * Morphological analyzers for minority languages
 - * Cataloguing of internet sites by languages and language corpora gathering
 - *

ATTITUDE

Facilitation of a Multilingual World

- * Open access,
- * Open-source,
- * Citizen science,
- * Crowd sourcing

RESOURCES

Minority language resources:

* <http://uralica.kansalliskirjasto.fi> (Open-access)

Loosely monitored media:

* <http://myv.wikipedia.org> <http://mdf.wikipedia.org>
(Open-source, open-access)

Language technology and development with our attitude

* <http://giellatekno.uit.no>

* <http://www.ling.helsinki.fi/kieliteknologia/tutkimus/hfst/>

EDUCATION

- * Word and language documentation in bilingual dictionaries
- * Finite-state morphology
- * Finite-state syntax
- * Intelligent Computer Assisted Language Learning (ICALL)
- * Rule-based translation

AKU (Avointa kieliteknologiaa uralilaisille vähemmistökielille)

- * ‘Open language technology for Minority Uralic Languages’ is presently building open-source:
 - * Morphological analyzers for **Hill Mari**, **Moksha**, **Livonian**, **Nenets** and **Olonets** with Finnish glosses for headwords.
 - * Duration 2 years
 - * Extent 20,000 headwords per language
- * Tangible results:
 - * Morphological analyzers, morphology-savvy web dictionaries, spell checkers; also base for ICALL

Morphological analyzers and generators

- * Moksha:
- * <http://giellatekno.uit.no/cgi/index.mdf.eng.html>
- * Erzya:
- * <http://giellatekno.uit.no/cgi/index.myv.eng.html>

Morphology-savvy web dictionaries

- * <http://valks.oahpa.no/mdf/fin>
- * <http://valks.oahpa.no/myv/fin>

- * For the Paris incubator
- * <http://valks.oahpa.no/mdf/fra>
- * <http://valks.oahpa.no/myv/fra>

Spell checkers

- * Voikko spellers generated on Mac OS and Linux are awaiting Windows compatibility

Base for Intelligent Computer Assisted Language Learning

- * Digits-to-numerals for text-to-speech
- * <http://giellatekno.uit.no/num.eng.html>

Open Access

- * National Library of Finland and University of Helsinki project has secured open access to media from 1920-30
- * <http://uralica.kansalliskirjasto.fi>
- * Open-source **OCR Editor** is also under development
- * ?Open-source OCR and transducer technology in planning



СЮКПРЯ Весенень!

Merci beaucoup!

Sources

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- * Maticsák, Sándor 2013: *The First Mordvin Translation of the Lord's Prayer*.
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