

**Language choice among rural
Mari families and their motives**

Elena Vedernikova

Eötvös Loránd University

What is the language choice?

- “Language choice is the core value of any language policy from the highest supra-national to the level of individual” (Fishman et al., 1971).
- Family determines the very linguistics repertoire of a person.

Mari El on the map of Russia



Background information on the Mari

Total number of Mari is 550,000 (Natsionalnyi sostav 2012); 285,600 (42%) live in Mari El;

- State languages in Mari El are Mari and Russian;
- Mari is taught as a state language in 98% of schools (2013);
- TV broadcasting time in Mari is 6.2 hours per week;
- Mari is actively used in social networks and web-pages;

Research methods

1. Tools

1) Revised questionnaire (elaborated in the ELDIA project);

2) Subjective vitality questionnaire (Bourhis et al. 1981);

3) Open-ended interviews (8):

- face-to-face (6);

- telephone (2).

- *Data collected in 2013 and 2016*

Research methods

- ***2. Sample and participants***

- 1) Two age groups (questioning):

- Teenagers (from 13 to 17 y.o.); divided by place of residence (urban or rural). N=222;
- Adults (from 18 to 70 y.o.); divided by age, gender, level of education, and place of residence. N=61;

- 2) Eight families (Interviewing). Divided into three groups:

- *Group I* (Mari) – 4 families; *Group II* (Mari-Russian) – 2 families; *Group III* (Russian speakers) – 2 families.

Background information on the groups

- **Group I (Mari speakers):**

- **Family 1:** *Maria (37 y.o.) & Aleksey (42 y.o.), Sovetskiy district. Son (13 y.o.), daughter (11 y.o.);*

Family 2: Anastasia (36 y.o.) & Vitaliy (36 y.o.), Sovetskiy district. Three sons (14 y.o.; 12 y.o.; 3 y.o.);

- **Family 3:** *Anna (26 y.o.) & Pavel (24y.o.), Sovetskiy district. One son (3 y.o.);*

- **Family 4:** *Nataliya (25 y.o.) & Vadim (32 y.o.), Orhshanka district. Two daughters (6 y.o.; 3 y.o.).*

Background information on the groups

- **Group II** (Mari and Russian speakers):
- **Family 5:** *Liudmila (34 y.o.) & Mikhail (35 y.o.), Sovetskiy district. Three sons (15 y.o.; 9 y.o. and 6 y.o.);*
- **Family 6:** *Larisa (34 y.o.) & Vladislav (28 y.o.). Sovetskiy district. One daughter (3 y.o.);*
- **Group III** (Russian speakers):
- **Family 7:** *Valentina (37 y.o.) & Sergey (42 y.o.). Kuzhener district. One daughter (9 y.o.) and a son (13 y.o.);*
- **Family 8:** *Svetlana (57 y.o.) and Igor (62 y.o.), Novyi Toryal district.. Three sons (37 y.o.; 34 y.o.; 25 y.o.) two daughters (39 y.o.; 27 y.o.)*

Linguistic image of rural Mari families


Language use by adults (N=61)

	Parent (%)		
Family member	Mari	Mari and Russian	Russian
Parent	51.0	17.6	31.4
Child	43.6	38.2	18.2

Language use by children (N=222)

	Children (%)		
Family member	Mari	Mari and Russian	Russian
Grandpa- rents	65.9	28.5	5.6
Parents	38.7	52.3	9.0
Siblings	25.9	60.0	14.1

Motives of language choice

1. Community (i.e. absence of language management within family);
2. Habitual way of communication  3. Language used from the very beginning of communication;
3. Strong ethnic values:
 - - *Sense of ethnicity*;
 - - *Homeland (association with the region a speaker lives in)*;
4. Pragmatic approach to the language choice;
5. Intuitive division between the home and community languages

Effect of community

1. “Ялыште чыланат марий улыт, марла кутырат. Меат ешыште марла кутырена. Алакузе, мо, сайын огеш чуч, рушла кутыраш тўналына гын... марла веле (Еш № 2).

Everybody speaks Mari in our village. We also speak Mari in our family. Somehow, hm, seems uncomfortable if we start speaking Russian... Only Mari (Group I; Family 2).

2. В семье говорим по-русски. Да у нас вся деревня считается русской. Соседи все русские. Поэтому неудивительно, что в семье тоже говорим по-русски (Семья № 8).

We all speak Russian in our family. Our village is considered Russian. All neighbors are Russian. That is why it is not surprising that everyone speaks Russian in our family (Group III; Family 8).

Habitual way of communication



*Я понимаю мари́йский и могу говорить на нём. Но для меня привычнее говорить по-русски.
Я всегда разговариваю по-русски (Семья № 8).*

I understand Mari and can speak it. But it is more habitual for me to speak Russian. I always speak Russian (Group III; Family 8).



Language used from the very beginning of communication

*Влад дене рушла кутырена... Ме тўналтыш гычак рушла кутырена. Марла тудо мошта...
Но шуэн мый денем кутыра. Южгунам мый тудлан иктаж-мом марла ойлем, мутым, але
мыскарам ыштем, но тудо рушла вашешта (Еш № 6).*

I speak Russian with Vlad... We have been speaking the Russian language since we met. He knows Mari... But he rarely speaks Mari with me. Sometimes I say something to him in Mari, some expressions, make jokes but he always replies to me in Russian (Group II; Family 6).

Strong ethnic values

- ***1. Sense of ethnicity***

Ме марий улына да марла кутырена... Марий ешыште шочынна... Омак умыло, молан марий-влак шке йочашт дене рушла кутырат? Меже вет марий улына. Тидыже мемнан йылме... (Еш № 3).

We are Mari and we speak Mari... We were born in Mari families... I really do not understand why Mari people speak Russian with their children. We are Mari. This is our language... (Group II; Family 3).

Strong ethnic values

- ***2. Homeland, or association of one's native language with region one lives in***

Марла веле кутырена... Марий Элыште вет илена... Тиде мемнан йылме (Еш № 1).

We only speak Mari... We live in Mari El... And this is our language (Group I; Family 1).

Pragmatic approach to the language choice

*Мы с детьми, в семье не говорим по-марийски. По-русски разговариваем... Почему? А зачем он нужен? Русский больше нужен... Марийский - это уже прошлое. На нём только в деревнях с бабушками разговаривать и всё
(Семья № 7).*

We do not speak Mari with our children. We speak Russian... Why? And why do we need it? We need Russian more... The Mari language is already the past. It is just to speak only with grannies in villages and that is all

(Group III; Family 7).

Pragmatic approach to the language choice

Мы с детьми, в семье не говорим по-марийски. По-русски разговариваем... Почему? А зачем он нужен? Русский больше нужен... Марийский - это уже прошлое. На нём только в деревнях с бабушками разговаривать и всё (Семья № 7).

We do not speak Mari with our children. We speak Russian... Why? And why do we need it? We need Russian more... The Mari language is already the past. It is just to speak only with grannies in villages and that is all (Group III; Family 7).

Intuitive division between the home and community languages **(by Suzanne Romaine)**

С мужем и детьми говорим по-русски... Мы все знаем марийский язык, но говорим только по-русски. По-марийски говорим с соседями и знакомыми... в наших родительских семьях мы тоже говорим по-русски или по-марийски очень мало. Так принято, что ли... Не знаю, как объяснить (Семья № 7).

We speak in Russian with my husband and children... We all know the Mari language, but we speak only Russian. We speak Mari with our neighbors, some familiar people... in our parental families we also speak Russian, or speak little Mari. It is a habit... I do not know, how to explain it (Group III; Family 7).

Factors of language choice

- Social
- Cultural
- Psychological

- Choice of Mari (ethnic values);
- Choice of Russian (pragmatic approach);
- Both languages have different social roles - *Intuitive division between one's home language and a language of community* (Susan Romaine's categorization);

Reasons for code-switching among rural Mari families

· *(As indicated by interviewees)*

1. A lack of Mari vocabulary
2. A limited command of Mari
3. Dialectal differences
4. Weak ethnic self-awareness *(has its roots in the Soviet period)*

Conclusions:

1. Linguistic behavior adults and children varies -

while older generation tends to communicate the native language, younger generation tends to mix languages;

2. Weakening of intergenerational language transmission is evident;

3. Factors of language choice of Mari are: language of community; habitual way of communication; language spoken from the very beginning of communication; strong ethnic values; pragmatic approach to the language issue, and intuitive division between the home and community language.

Literature:

- Bourhis, R., Giles, Y. , Rosenthal, H. and D. (1981). Notes on the construction of a `Subjective Vitality Questionnaire` for ethnolinguistic groups. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 2, 144-155
- Fishman, J., Cooper, R. & Conrad, A. (1971). *The Spread of English: the sociology of English as an additional language*. Rowley, MA; Newbery House.
- Natsionalnyi sostav (2012) = *Национальный состав Республики Марий Эл. Итоги Всероссийской переписи населения 2010 года. Статистический сборник*. Йошкар-Ола.
- Romaine, S. (1995). *Bilingualism*. 2nd edition. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Vedernikova, E. (2018) Language choice among rural Maris and their motives. *Finnisch-Ugrische Forschungen*. 234-254.