



Promising Directions for Continuing the Study of N. Witsen's List of Mordovian Words

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Abstract

The article theses the promising directions of continuing the research of N. Witsen's "List of Mordovian Words", published by him in 1692. The following directions were chosen: the circumstances of collecting materials for the source; the place of collecting materials for the source; the ethnolanguage definition of informants; the method of collecting materials from the source; the semantics of some Mordovian lexemes in the second half of the XVII century and its significance for modern Mordovian lexicology. The author's own field materials are also used

Keywords: Moksha-Mordovian Language; Erzya-Mordovian Language; Lexicography; Lexicology; N. Witsen

Introduction

The "List of Mordovian words", published by the Dutch traveler and politician N. Witsen on the pages of his work "Northern and Eastern Tartary" [Noord en oost Tartarie], is today the oldest known source of the lexicography of the Mordovian languages.

This short lexicon has repeatedly attracted the attention of researchers, it was studied especially carefully by A.P. Feoktistov, who identified a number of features of this list of Mordovian words [1]. However, it seems to us that the possibilities of continuing the research and interpretation of the materials of this list are far from exhausted. This applies both to the linguistic side and to various historical and everyday circumstances of collecting the material.

In this paper, we will outline some further promising directions for the study of this lexicographic source.

Lexemes Indicating the Circumstances of the Collection of Material for the List of Mordovian Words

N. Witsen cites the lexeme Ludna - 'leaves'. In the Moksha-Mordovian language, a leaf is a Lopa; leaves, respectively, is a Lopat. There is a moon token, but it means last year's fallen leaves. It must be assumed that the collectors of the material themselves did not speak Mordovian languages and asked the informants for the names of certain objects using sign language. This is indicated by some other lexemes of the list. For example, Kud in the list translates as a 'room', whereas in all Moksha-Mordovian dialects it has the meaning

of a 'house'; a 'regiment or a detachment of soldiers' is Lam Alomun, that is, just a 'lot of people': Lama is a 'lot' + Loman is a 'person'; 'wet' is Pisimikise, but 'wet' in Moksha-Mordovian language is Nachka, and Pisimikise is a 'rainy year (rainy summer)'. Thus, the presence of the Ludna lexeme in the list in the meaning of 'leafs' may indicate the time of year when the material was collected: there was no green leafs and the correspondents pointed to last year's leafs, the name of which they were informed by the informants. Considering that there was no leafs on the trees, and the ground was free of snow, it can be concluded that the material (or part of it) it was going to be in late autumn or in the middle of spring.

Lexemes Indicating the Place of Collection of the Material for the List of Mordovian Words

A significant number of lexemes concerning the serif line (Ostena – 'wall'; Val – 'shaft'; Basne – 'tower') confirms the information given by N. Witsen himself that the Mordvins, described by him, lived near the serif line. This fact suggests that the Mordovian population of this region was heterogeneous, possibly polyethnic, which led to the presence of Erzya-Mordovian lexemes in the described Moksha-Mordovian dialect.

Ethnolanguage Definition of Dialect Speakers, on the Basis of Which the List of Mordovian Words is Compiled

A.P. Feoktistov noted that the materials of the list indicate that the collection of information was carried out among the speakers of some Moksha dialect, influenced by the Erzya language [2]. This, in addition to a number of Erzya lexemes in Witsen's list, is also indicated by phonetics: in place of Moksha-Mordovian phoneme [ä], Erzya-Mordovian phoneme [e] is often found here. A similar situation is observed in many regions of Mordovian living, and not only in the so-called secondary settlement zones, but also on the territory of the Republic of Mordovia. The most massively mixed Mordovian dialects are found on the territory of the modern Penza region, there is also likely a number of Turkisms noted in the list that could penetrate into this dialect from the speech of the Tatar Mishars living on the same territory, who were also actively involved in the protection of the protective feature. In addition, one of the features of the vocalism of the words of the list is characteristic: in place of the Moksha-Mordovian phoneme [e] here phoneme [i]. This situation is observed in a number of Moksha-Mordovian dialects of the southeastern areal, in particular, on the Samara Luka peninsula [3]. Also in the list there are lexemes that are characteristic only for dialects of the Western dialect of the Moksha-Mordovian language, for example, Schumbas – 'hare'. Summing up

all these data, it would be possible to determine a fairly specific area in which N. Witsen's information was collected. However, due to the irregularity of a number of phonetic features, as well as taking into account historical factors, it should be noted that, probably, the material was collected by N. Witsen's correspondents in different villages, therefore, the noted characteristics are often irregular.

Clarification of the Semantics of Some Mordovian Lexemes According to N. Witsen's list.

The semantics of a number of lexemes indicated in the list is more suitable to the original Moksha, currently it is lost in the literary and written Mordovian languages and in most of their dialects, and is restored only by individual dialects and by toponymy, which has some conservation effect. Here are some examples. The lexeme Lej [l'ej], which currently has the meaning of a 'river' in literary and written Mordovian languages, is marked in the meaning of 'valley' by N. Witsen. This meaning is closer to the multivariant semantics found for this lexeme in Moksha-Mordovian dialects and Erzya-Mordovian dialects, where either a borrowing from the Russian language occurs in the meaning of the 'river', or a lexeme similar to the designation of water – Ved / Väd (N. Witsen also gives the same meaning for the word 'river', his 'river' is Ved, which is also confirmed the lexeme given in the list for the phrase big river is Oscuved). These data are important for Mordovian toponymy. The second example. The lexeme Kal [kal'] currently has the meaning of 'willow' in the literary-written Mordovian languages and in most dialects; N. Witsen gives a 'bush' for the lexeme Kal. At the same time, data from some Moksha-Mordovian dialects and Erzya-Mordovian dialects, as well as data from Mordovian toponymy, give reason to believe that earlier the semantics of this lexeme was much broader in Mordovian languages. Let's give for example some of the meanings of this word, recorded by us in the Mordovian villages: kal is 'all breeds (woody)' (Klyavlin'sky dialect of the Erzya-Mordovian language); kal is 'large trees growing by the water' (Moksha-Mordovian; Uzyukovo, Stavropol district, Samara region, Russia); kal is 'bushes growing by shores near the water' (Erzya-Mordovian; Staraya Malykla, Novomalyklin'sky district, Ulyanovsk region, Russia); kal – 'vegetation in swamps' (Erzya-Mordovian; Alexandrovka, Novomalyklin'sky district, Ulyanovsk region, Russia). In toponymy: lake Kal on the Samara Luka near the Moksha-Mordovian village Tornovoe; A.A. Shakhmatov noted the toponym Poigal lisma – the name of a spring near the Erzya-Mordovian village Orkino in the Saratov region [4]. Here poigal = poy – 'aspens' + kal is a 'frequent growth', that is, a 'dense young growth of aspens'. All these values lead us to the original semantics of this lexeme: a 'plant growing near water', 'bushy, with thin bending branches'. V.I. Vershinin

assumes approximately the same semantics for this lexeme in the Mordovian languages in the past [5].

Lexemes Indicating the Method of Collecting Material for the List of Mordovian Words

In the list you can find lexemes that are not currently found in Mordovian dialects. A significant part of them are zoonyms related to rare animals, or animals that do not occur at all on the territory of the Mordvins' residence. We think that in these cases it is also likely that the correspondents showed the informants pictures of animals that they had never seen in reality. From the experience of our own field research, we note that Mordvins, with an unknown phenomenon, tries to formulate a definition for it by improvisation. For example, the 'lion' in N. Witsen's list is designated as Orxofta [6]. We believe that this is orks-ofta = orks – 'the most terrible' + ofta – 'bear'. That is, the informants, looking at the picture with an unknown predator, chose the most formidable animal known to them and added the appropriate epithet. Another example. In the list of N. Witsen there is the lexeme Vaksar – 'shield', from the Moksha-Mordovian lexeme Wakssa – 'nearby' + a rare affix of the Mordovian languages [r], which previously may have been used more widely (compare the r-th affixes of the Mari languages). The fact that this is not an accident is indicated by the following lexeme of N. Witsen's list: Vaksiarschamo is a 'shell', where Vaksar is a 'shield',

Shama is a 'face', here in the meaning of the 'front side', by analogy with such Moksha-Mordovian established phrases as panda shama is a 'mountain slope'.

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