

Timothy Riese: Newest Finno-Ugrian Language Textbooks in Russian I: Mari

One of the many propitious aspects of the dissolution of the Soviet regime has been an upswing in the legal and social opportunities for the defense and development of the indigenous languages of Russia. In the case of many of the smaller Uralic (as well as non-Uralic) languages the turning point came too late to save them from what would appear to be a drawn-out death struggle. As regards the larger indigenous languages the last word has not been spoken. The last decades of the Soviet era saw a stagnation in the number of their speakers and a marked reduction in their spheres of use, particularly in education. Now their situation has improved, but is still in jeopardy. One of the indicators of increasing interest in the indigenous languages has been the publication of new textbooks for the use of Russian speakers interested in learning these languages. These textbooks can differ widely in length and intent. In the present review I should like to comment on the following Mari textbooks published in the last decade: 1) *Marijskij jazyk dlja vsech I + II* (Mari for Everybody), 1990 and 1991, 2) *Poro keche!* (Hello!), 1998, and 3) *Marijskij jazyk* (Mari Language), 1999.

1a. Zorina, Zoja – Krylova, Galina – Yakimova, Emma: *Marijskij jazyk dlja vsech I*. Yoshkar-Ola, Marijskoje knizhnoje izdatelstvo, 1990. 224 pages.

This is the first volume of what is by far the largest and most detailed Mari textbook published recently. It is intended for a broad range of all those interested in learning Mari, whether by themselves with the help of this book or within the context of a structured course. The volume opens with a short introduction written by ZOJA ZORINA on Mari phonetics and pronunciation, vowel harmony, word stress (pages 4-12). The remainder of the book is the work of GALINA KRYLOVA and EMMA YAKIMOVA, two sisters who grew up in a small Mari village, but who attended the university in Yoshkar-Ola and have been living there since. KRYLOVA teaches French at the university, YAKIMOVA German. EMMA YAKIMOVA has also been active in the field of Finno-Ugrian linguistics and still retains an excellent command of Estonian from her time at the University of Tartu. The book is divided into four parts (themes), each devoted (very loosely) to different aspects of Mari vocabulary (I. Let's Get Acquainted, II. Work and Leisure, III. Food, IV. In the Countryside). Each of these parts consists of four lessons, making a total of sixteen in all. Each lesson is structured as follows: 1) Text (in some instances a dialogue), 2) New Words, 3) Text Explanations, 4) Grammar, 5) Exercises, 6) Additional Text(s). Ad 1) The texts included (all original) become ever more complex in grammar and vocabulary and despite being "typical" texts for books of this kind are not boring to read. Ad 2) Following the text the new words are given in the order of their appearance in the text rather than in alphabetical order which facilitates working with the text. The Mari words are followed immediately by their Russian translations with no difference being made in their typography. The usage of italics for either the Mari or the Russian words would make this section easier to use. Ad 3) Here we typically find short explanations on the usage of certain words or structures. In a few cases the explanations can become a bit long and would better have been included in the grammar section per se, (e.g. the discussion of vocative forms in chapter I:3). Ad 4) The basic points of Mari grammar are presented succinctly, but with sufficient attention to detail and number of examples. In this section Mari words and sentences are italicized, (unless they are part of a table in which case they tend to blend in with the Russian equivalents). There is quite a bit of grammar to be covered and each

lesson contains a goodly quantity of new material. Still, any motivated learner will have no difficulty dealing with the amount of grammar presented. Ad 5) In this section quite a number of exercises are given, this being in my opinion an indispensable part of a good textbook. There are usually exercises connected with the text and then grammatical exercises on the material covered in the lesson. These can have different forms (supply the proper ending, fill in the blank, transform the sentence, translate into Mari/Russian, etc.). Ad 6) The inclusion of an additional text (additional texts) at the end of the individual lessons is a good idea. The texts, however, often draw on additional vocabulary or grammatical points not yet covered and thus can be quite difficult, if not to say frustrating, for the learner. A closer correspondence to the learners' level at the moment might have been a good idea. At the end of each theme (i.e. after every fourth lesson) a short "Review" is included. This usually takes the form of grammatical tables referring to the recent lessons, grammatical exercises, and additional texts. Pages 197 to 203 hold a key to (some of) the grammatical exercises. It would definitely have been desirable to expand this section and provide answers to at least almost all the exercises. This is of particular importance to all those learning Mari on their own (which includes almost everybody outside of Russia). On pages 204 to 211 we find a summary of the Mari grammar discussed in Volume I in the form of tables. This is followed by a Mari-Russian glossary of the words used in the texts or exercises (212-221) and a table of contents (222-224). An excellent feature of this book (as well as of Volume II) is that all Mari words are marked with an accent for stress. Whereas stress in Mari is not particularly difficult to learn, there are various rules to be learned along with some exceptions and the consistent marking serves to make proper stressing automatic for the learners.

1b. Krylova, Galina – Yakimova, Emma: *Marijskij jazyk dlja vsech II. Yoshkar-Ola, Marijskoje knizhnoje izdatelstvo, 1991. 208 pages.*

This is the second volume of the textbook and its use presupposes that the learner has mastered the grammar and vocabulary of Volume I. The structure is the same as that of the first volume. Once again the book is divided into four parts (themes): 1. Marij El, 2. The Mari Language, 3. Art, 4. Mari Customs and Celebrations. Each of these themes consists of three lessons, making a total of 12 in all. In this volume the authors make the attempt to acquaint the learners with various aspects of Mari culture, history, and literature, an excellent idea since all those motivated enough to learn the language are definitely interested in these subjects. The structure of the lessons is the same as in the first volume, one difference being, however, that more emphasis is placed on the "additional texts" (at the end of the lessons or in the "Reviews"). These are often (adapted) original texts from Mari newspapers or Mari literary works. As in Volume I, the "additional texts" are not always easy to read, being generally more "difficult" than the texts placed at the beginning of the various lessons. At the end of the volume we find once again a short summary of the grammar covered in the form of tables (154-157) and a key to (some of) the grammatical exercises (158-160). As in the case of the first volume the key could have been expanded to facilitate the work of all those learning Mari on their own. Following the key are the Mari-Russian and Russian-Mari glossaries (161-204) and a table of contents (205-206).

It would not be an exaggeration to say that *Marijskij jazyk dlja vsech* is an excellent textbook. The authors used their long experience in language teaching to provide us with a book that conveys all the major points of Mari grammar as well as providing information on the Mari people themselves. All those making the effort to work through the two volumes acquire a solid linguistic basis that can be built upon. Our

department is also investigating the possibility of translating this textbook (and adapting it to the needs of German-speakers) in order to make it available to all those not in command of Russian.

2. Uchajev, Zinovij – Jefremov, Arkadij: *Poro Keche! 30 urokov marijskogo jazyka*. (Hello! 30 Lessons in Mari). Yoshkar-Ola, Marijskoje knizhnoje izdatelstvo, 1998. 148 pages.

The authors of this book state in the introduction that its goal is to teach non-Mari speakers to understand Mari and to speak it to a certain extent. They continue to say that not all aspects of Mari grammar will be covered and recommend that the learners also use the *Russko-marijskij razgovornik* (Russian-Mari Phrase Book) by ZINOVIJ UCHAJEV which contains information on the phonetic and morphological structure of Mari as well as dialogues on different topics. The book consists of thirty lessons (pages 4-85) which are made up for the most part of short treatments of basic points of Mari grammar and dialogues or phrase collections on certain topics as well as a list of the new words presented in each lesson. In the grammar sections the Mari words are italicized, in the dialogues, phrases and new vocabulary listings they are printed in blue which makes working with the book easier. The lessons contain no texts or exercises. Following the thirty lessons (pages 86-108) there are, to be sure, several pages of various sorts of exercises, including translation exercises, but no key, meaning that they are of use only to learners using the book within the framework of a course. Pages 109 to 131 contain two glossaries (Mari-Russian and Russian-Mari) after which the major points of the grammar covered are summarized in tables (132-145).

Poro Keche! has more modest goals than *Marijskij jazyk dlja vsech* and is not nearly as well suited for use without a teacher than the latter work. Still, it is well adapted to the needs of those who wish to acquire a basic knowledge of the Mari language working together with a teacher.

3. Ignajeva, R. P.: *Marijskij jazyk* (Mari Language). Yoshkar-Ola, Marijskij Institut Obrazovanija, 1999. 72 pages.

This book is intended for beginners in schools or institutes of higher learning attending Mari classes with a teacher. Its author tested the material in Russian-speaking classes at a school in Yoshkar-Ola. The book consists of ten chapters for each of which the author recommends a class-time of 5 to six hours. The chapters are made up of the following parts: text, dialogue, list of new words, constructions/phrases, exercises on the text, grammar, grammar exercises. The grammar is explained very succinctly, usually in the form of tables, which is feasible here since this section of the chapters is intended only to be a summary of what is conveyed by the class teacher. The texts and dialogues are agreeably long and pleasant to read. Additional, shorter texts can also be found in the exercises. There is no key to the exercises or glossary, but then the book is not intended for those learning Mari at home without the help of a teacher. All in all, the textbook is a well-crafted, useful help for teachers of Mari and their students.

It should also be mentioned that the authors of the books listed above have also written other pedagogical works for Russian-speakers learning Mari and/or Mari-language schools, e.g. GALINA KRYLOVA – EMMA YAKIMOVA: *Marij jylme* (Mari Language), a school book for the second class, 1999; R. P. IGNAJEVA: *Russko-marijskij razgovornik* (Russian-Mari Phrase Book), 1999; ZINOVIJ UCHAJEV: *Marij jylme – Teorij* (Theory of the Mari Language), a school book for classes 5 to 9, 1993.

The textbooks presented above have different intentions and target groups, thus rendering any sort of ranking superfluous. All of them fulfill the goals set for them by their authors and can be of great value for all those learning Mari. As regards those interested in the Mari language outside of Russia the most useful textbook is by far *Marijskij jazyk dlja vsech*, as unlike the others it is well suited for self-study without the aid of a teacher. It can also be supplemented with the other two books.