

ORIGIN AND ROLE OF THE HILL MARI FOLK SIGNS WITH NEGATIVE PREDICTION

**Irina V. Trubyanova^{1*}, Anna. L. Kolyago², Galina L. Sokolova³, Alla A. Fokina⁴ &
Andrey V. Rychkov⁵**

¹ Assoc. Prof., Mari State University, Russia, opleva@mail.ru

² Assoc. Prof., Mari State University, Russia, kolyago@yandex.ru

³ Assoc. Prof., Mari State University, Russia, askgalinasokol@mail.ru

⁴ Senior Lecturer, Mari State University, Russia, allafokina70@mail.ru

⁵ Assoc. Prof., Mari State University, Russia, rychkovandre@yandex.ru

*Corresponding author

Abstract

The article deals with one of the most numerous categories of folk signs in the Hill Mari language - these are signs that contain negative prediction. This category is subject to more fractional division. Inside the group, there are signs that warn of diseases; signs that predict death; signs, promising misfortune, poverty, quarrels; signs of unsuccessful marriage, unhappy family life, orphanhood, widowhood. According to lexical features of signs, consequences are made about the historical period of their origin, as a result of which ancient and modern signs are distinguished. The religion of the Hill Mari people, associated with certain epoch also tells about the origin of some signs, as it was originally paganism, later Christianity. The target of signs also plays an important role. In the course of the study, it was found out, that signs with negative prediction were used for the purposes of education, warning of dangers or informing about inevitable future events. One of the areas of the analyses is the syntactic structure of sentences expressing folk signs, which are made up of subordinate clauses. According to the meaning of the subordinate clause, there is a division into rational and irrational or superstitious meaning. Rational explanation is based on well-known, scientifically proven, logically-built facts, while a superstitious explanation defies logic, or pushes to the thought of unexplored, very subtle connections between phenomena. At the same time, a superstitious component reveals the connection between a part of the body or an object that performs an unintentional act and the punishment sent to that part of the body or object. The article notes the difficulties associated with determining the origin of signs due to modern technologies and means of communication. However, the role of collecting and analyzing of such material is of great importance for establishing peculiarities of life of the Mari people, since signs reflect the most important aspects of people's life. Signs convey wisdom of people from generation to generation and characteristic features of the Hill Mari nation. Folk signs have linguistic, ethnographic, and historical significance.

Keywords: Hill Mari language, folk sign, groups of signs, negative prediction, role of signs, origin of signs, rational meaning of signs, irrational meaning of signs.

1 INTRODUCTION

Since ancient times folk signs were guides for people to realize certain actions and expect alleged events. They helped to get prepared for these events physically and mentally, and possibly prevent undesirable ones. Signs were especially appreciated and used in the period preceding the emergence of modern technologies that allow to predict weather conditions, biological and physical laws. The value of folk signs is indisputable – they are people’s wisdom, collected for centuries, although the attitude towards certain signs, especially of superstitious character, is subjective. The definition of sign in our research is taken from the Explanatory dictionary of the Russian language, where the sign is understood as a phenomenon or a case that is considered to be foreknowledge of anything among people (Ozhegov, Shvedova, 1999, p. 594).

Mari signs have long attracted attention of connoisseurs of Mari literature, they were published in the first periodicals in the Mari language, in particular, in the "Mari Calendar", they were the subject of research of linguists. A great effort to collect and systematize the Meadow Mari and Hill Mari signs was done by A. Y. Kitikov (Kitikov, 1989). Hill Mari signs are found in the collection of folk sayings by F.T. Gracheva (Gracheva, 2001). Superstitious component in the Mari language in comparison with the Russian and English languages is considered by Y.Y. Fliginskikh, S. L. Yakovleva, R. A. Kudryavtseva, K. Yu. Badina and S. S. Akeldina (Fliginskikh, 2017, pp. 50-58; Fliginskikh, Yakovleva, Kudryavtseva, Badina and Akeldina, 2016, pp. 1634-1640.).

Examples of signs for the analysis were mainly taken from the collections of folk signs by A. Y. Kitikov (Kitikov, 1989) and F.T. Gracheva (Gracheva, 2001).

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2.1 Syntactic structure of signs

In terms of syntactic structure, most folk signs are compound conditional sentences, which consist of two parts, the main clause, which describes the result, and the subordinate clause, which describes the condition. In some signs, conjunctions that are characteristic of conditional sentences are absent, which indicates that they are used in the common speech: «Йылмы мычаш нанга - соредалмаш лиэш». ‘The tip of the tongue is itching - there will be a quarrel’ (Gracheva, 2001, p. 216). In the process of classification into positive, negative, domestic, natural, and other groups of signs, both clauses of compound sentences are taken into account, so they can be viewed together, fall into either one or the other group by meaning. Main clause may contain rational and irrational information, i.e. superstitious meaning. Superstition is the explanation of what in its time did not find a natural-scientific explanation or did not exert the necessary educational influence. The rational part is based on considerations of security and scientific ideas and is hidden under superstitious significance. For example, it is shown in the prohibition of long-lasting bathing: «Шуку ит нуштыл - выдиа кыча». ‘Do not bathe for a long time - merman will catch you (Gracheva, 2001, p. 223). Long bathing, as it is known, may cause hypothermia and other dangerous consequences. Nevertheless, it is difficult to explain it to an ignorant person, therefore it was necessary to intimidate by otherworldly forces. A similar superstitious explanation is expressed in a sign about the prohibition of bathing at noon, in the peak of solar activity, which can exert a detrimental effect on a person: «Тура кечывалын выдыш пыраш, нуштылаш, колым кычаш ак яры - выдиа кыча». ‘It is not allowed to go into the water, swim, fish at noon – a merman can catch you’ (Gracheva, 2001, p. 222).

2.2 Groups of folk signs with negative prediction

Hill Mari signs with negative prediction make up the most numerous group. Their common meaning is to warn, predict something unfavorable that may occur under certain conditions. As a result of more careful analysis, they are divided into specific groups: signs warning of diseases; signs that foreshadow death, widowhood, orphanhood; signs, promising misfortune, needs, quarrels; signs of unsuccessful marriage, unhappy family life. The predominance of the signs with negative prediction can be explained by the desire of the Mari people to foresee misfortunes and to try to get around them.

Judging by the phenomena and objects that are met in signs and are no longer used in contemporary life, we can talk about the past relevance of the appeal to them. However, possible outcomes, despite their superstitious character, have an impact on people even nowadays, so subconscious fear of them persists. The existence and the quantity of signs concerning certain aspects of the Hill Mari people’s life make it possible to say about the most important things for the Mari people, which they highly appreciated, guarded, and feared of. Mostly, they concern everyday family life, health, happiness.

2.2.1 Signs predicting diseased condition

Signs warning of illnesses make one of the largest groups among the signs with negative prediction. Some of them came out from simple observation, such as on health condition: «Вадеш тырвынцат гынь, иргодеш ясы лиат». 'If you sneeze in the evening – you will become sick the other day' (Gracheva, 2001, p. 214). «Ирок ир качкаш ак яры; ирок иры качмы тотан, шагышан ак ли». 'Do not eat early in the morning; early food will not be useful' (Gracheva, 2001, p. 215). The cause of undesirable consequences, as a rule, are deliberate or unintentional actions of a person himself.

Many signs contain warnings about how one should not behave or how to protect oneself from injuries and dangers. Consequently, the signs provide information of educational and warning character, hidden in a superstitious shell, passed from generation to generation. In the example of the food taken from a knife to the mouth, the real danger lies in the possibility of being cut or pricked with a knife, however, the superstitious component warns of the possibility of cramps in the abdomen: «Кызы гач качкаш ак яры, мышкырышты шыраш тынгалеш». 'It is not good to eat from a knife, you are going to have cramps in the stomach' (Gracheva, 2001, p. 219). Pagan roots and ways to impose certain moral concepts can be seen in the origin of some signs, as in the example of spitting on Fire, which is considered one of the main Gods of pagan religion and the corresponding punishment is the disease of the organ that spits - the tongue. At the same time, spitting on anything, in particular, on fire, is a demonstration of the lack of correct upbringing that is supposed to be amended with the help of signs: «Тыл выкы шывымыкы - йылмеш тылара налеш». 'If you spit on fire, you will have sores on your lips' (Gracheva, 2001, p. 222). The sign about kicking fire is an additional confirmation of this example. As a result, the leg which kicks fire should ache. From the rational point of view, it is a dangerous activity showing also the lack of ethical principles.

The element of upbringing is revealed in the signs, in which sores and injuries occur among those who usually peek: «Сынзаэш шож шачын гынь - пичы ыраж вашт кум-гынят анженат». 'If a sty appears on your eye, you were prying about anybody through a hole' (Gracheva, 2001, p. 221); who urinate in unallowed places: «Тошты куды варышты кудываж улы, тышак тугы лактеш ак яры - капеш лим лиэш». 'There is a boggart in the site of the old summer premise, it is forbidden to water the horse there, you will have sores on your body' (Gracheva, 2001, p. 222). «Кечы ваштареш кыжат гынь, кид парняэш шыл шырпы лактын кердеш». 'If you urinate in front of the Sun, the hangnails might appear on your fingers' (Gracheva, 2001, p. 217); who throws one's hair: «Шерын лыкмы упым олицашкы, тугы лыктын ит шу: тугы шуэт гынь, кек пыжашыш попазен кердеш; кек пыжашышкы варештеш гынь, вует каршташ, шужгаш тынгалеш». 'Do not throw your hair out to the street or to the ground: birds can pick it up and put to their nest; if your hair gets into the nest, your head will ache and buzz' (Gracheva, 2001, p. 223); who plays too much: «Шуку (кужын) шутяш ак яры: шутя мутя, шутя гыц кир лиэш». 'It's not good to joke for a long time: the joke is troubling, the joke will result in torture' (Gracheva, 2001, p. 223).

A distinctive syntactic feature of signs with negative prediction from all the other groups of signs is the imperative mood, which intensifies the meaning of danger: «Качмы годым стол оголеш ит шыц - марлан ат ке». 'While eating, do not sit at the corner of the table - you will not marry in the near future' (Gracheva, 2001, p. 216).

Among the signs, there are also impersonal sentences. Characteristic features of these types of sentences in the Mari and German languages are studied in the works of G.L. Sokolova (Sokolova, 2013, pp. 154-156.). Impersonal sentences, which make signs, are most often formed with the words «ак яры» 'not allowed', expressing the prohibition: «Сумкым седыраш шындаш ак яры – окса ак ли». 'Do not put a bag on the floor - there will be no money' (Gracheva, 2001, p. 182). «Тошты корны вылан портым шындаш ак яры: семня пурым ак уж». 'You should not build a house in the site of an old road, the family will not be happy there' (Gracheva, 2001, p. 222]. Instructions and prohibitions in the signs, formed as indefinite personal sentences, express lesser degree of negative prediction, more likely a common practice in order to avoid undesirable consequences: «Куслымы оксам вадеш ак пуэп – оксадымы лиат». 'It is not good to give borrowed money back in the evening – you will have no money' (Gracheva, 2001, p. 182).

Meanwhile, there are also signs telling symptoms of recovery: «Ирок тырвынцат гынь, ясы гыц, цер гыц карангат, торланет». 'Morning sneezing to recovery' (Gracheva, 2001, p. 216). They make up a group of signs with positive prediction, but they are very few.

Some signs offer voodoo ways to cure diseases. They are not scientifically confirmed, and, unfortunately, do not find any explanation at present time: «Качмы годым ышма гыц кенвацшы сыкыр пыдыргым шывылвыдеш нортымыкы да, шыгыль ямдымы шаям пелештымы шамакым келесен, шыгылеш шыралмыкы, шыгыль ямын кердеш». 'If to moisten with slobber bread crumbs being dropped during the

meal and put it on a wart, after saying the spell, the wart will pass' (Gracheva, 2001, p. 216). «Шу йоралтын гынь, шактем пырыл каштын, эрта». 'If your neck is lopsided (you cannot turn your neck), you have to take a sieve to your mouth and walk around with it – your neck will recover' (Gracheva, 2001, p. 224).

2.2.2 Signs predicting death

A large group is also made up of signs that portend death. They cannot be called precautionary, since the available signs are most often not prevented: «Нер мычаш легешта - кўн-гынят колымы гишан увер лиэш». 'If the tip of the nose is itching - there will be a message about someone's death'. «Цывы пачеш шудым тышкапта – колышы гишан колмыла. 'If a hen hitches up grass to its tail - there will be a message of death'. «Пи урмыжеш – колышы лиэш». 'The dog howls to the message of death'. «Ялвындаш легешта - колышы лиэш». 'Feet itch to the deceased' (Gracheva, 2001, p. 225). But sometimes people try to prevent bad predictions, for example, a howling dog is often scolded, forced to quiet in order to suppress the undesirable event.

The same group includes signs, which express conviction of any negative actions, punishment for which will be endured after death. In these signs, their educational role is manifested in the form of warnings from what one should not do: «Йал доны кычым пычкедет гынь, колымыкет, кычетым тыш погаш колтат». 'Do not cut your nails in someone else's house: you will be sent to collect nails after death from where you left them' (Gracheva, 2001, p. 216). «Рушарнян седырам, выргемым мышкаш ак шудеп, мышкат гынь, колымыкет лявыран, мышмы выдым вес светышты тыланет йуктат». 'It is forbidden to wash the floor and clothes on Sunday: you will be made to drink this dirty water in the other world after death' (Gracheva, 2001, p. 220). These folk signs allow to observe the conversion of the Hill Mari people from Paganism to Christianity, more precisely Orthodoxy. In Orthodox religion Sunday is considered to be the day of worship of God. It is a sin to spend such days in work without prayers and commemoration of the Most High. Punishment for disobedience is frightening, clear for ordinary people.

The most undesirable manners and habits in behavior were suppressed by intimidation by the death of relatives, as a result of which children could remain orphans, women - widows, which was also reflected in the signs: «Качмы годым сыкыр лаштыкым кодаш ак яра – тылыкеш кодат». 'Do not leave a piece of bread after having meal – you will be left an orphan' (Gracheva, 2001, p. 216). «Стол лошты шынзымы годым ялым ырзаш ак яры – тылык кодат». 'Do not shake your leg while sitting at the table – you will become an orphan' (Gracheva, 2001, p. 221). «Амалымы анзыц упым шерат гынь, тылык ватеш кодат». 'If you comb your hair in the evening, before going to bed, you will be left a widow' (Gracheva, 2001, p. 214).

2.2.3 Signs promising misfortune, privation, quarrels

Folk signs with negative prediction are also those that promise misfortunes and hardships in a general sense. These signs appeared due to observation of natural phenomena: «Шуку эхель лиэш гынь, нелы и лиэш». 'If a lot of acorns have grown, the year will be difficult'. «Каля паша гынь, нужда год лиэш». 'If the mice are overbred, the year will be unfruitful' (Gracheva, 2001, p. 216). «Охыра шергы гынь, народлан ылаш нелы и лиэш». 'If the price of onion is high, people's life will be difficult' (Gracheva, 2001, p. 219).

2.2.4 Signs of unsuccessful marriage, unhappy family life

Within the group of folk signs with negative prediction there are signs of unhappy family life, which can come as a result of careless handling of things, unthoughtful attitude to the building of a house, indecent behavior: «Седырам сук коден ыштылшы ыдырлан шадыраан мары попаза». 'A girl, who leaves the floor unclean after sweeping, will marry a man with a small pox on his face' (Gracheva, 2001, p. 220). «Тошты корны вылан портым шындаш ак яры: семня пурым ак уж». 'Do not build the house in the place of an old road: the family will not be happy there' (Gracheva, 2001, p. 222). «Портышты шар улы, шижкет, мырет гынь, порт гыц шар лактын кеа, варешыжы келтымаш пыра». 'There is a brownie in the house, if you whistle and sing there, the brownie will leave the house, and an evil spirit will dwell in his place' (Gracheva, 2001, p. 220). Mari people consider family as the basis of life, therefore, their attitude to everything that is related with family life is special and tremulous.

3 CONCLUSION

In the course of the study of folk signs with negative prediction we identified signs that predict diseased condition; signs that foreshadow death, widowhood, orphanhood; signs, promising misfortune, privation, quarrels; signs of unsuccessful marriage, unhappy family life. Meanings of signs allow us to treat them as a potent tool of teaching proper way of life, including rules of building dwellings, wedding customs, as well as ways to warn of dangers, difficulties, troubles, and misfortunes. It is obvious that phenomena, objects,

actions described in the signs, and their interpretation can indicate the period of their origin, the conditions of life and work, the religion of the Mari people, their transition from paganism to Orthodoxy.

At present time, it is difficult to talk about belonging of signs to a particular place of origin, region, certain nation, unless they were recorded earlier. The boundaries are effaced and distances are prolonged due to Internet and modern communication technologies. The feature of folk signs as being sent by word of mouth makes the process of searching the traces of their origin complicated. The availability of literature, including collections of Mari signs, published and spread earlier in almost all families, contributes to the imposition of national character to signs.

4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The reported study was funded by RFBR and Government of the Mari EI according to the research project № 17-14-12602/17

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