

Chuvash Language Relics from the 18th Century and the First Chuvash Grammar

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Recording of the Chuvash language relics started relatively late, in the 18th century. We do not have at our disposal language relics of interior origin because the Chuvash people did not have their own literacy. The first descriptions of the language come from foreigners visiting their land in the 18th century. Mainly vocabularies preserved from the first half of the century, later, from the 1770s, when the conversion to Orthodox religion has started, this Turkic people of the Middle Volga Region got more serious attention.

In his studies published in 1949 and 1951, Jegorov made a short introduction into the 18th-century Chuvash vocabularies and dictionaries and presented data on their emergence (Jegorov 1949; Jegorov 1951). Later scholarship did not have much information to add to these works. L.P. Sergeev made a short linguistic evaluation of the vocabularies (Sergeev 1969; Sergeev 1972), and we get useful information on their historical background from V. D. Dimitriev (Dimitriev 1960; Dimitriev 1967). Even Hovdhaugen (Hovdhaugen 1975: 276–279) and Klára Agyagási (Agyagási 1982a) published useful data and new assumptions on the emergence of some of these manuscripts – works by Johann Eberhard Fischer and Gerhard Friedrich Müller. By the moment, these sources are not sufficient for making conclusions on language history because their scholarly evaluation, except for the Chuvash lexemes of the Pallas dictionary (Savel'ev 2014) has not been done.¹

1. The 18th-century Chuvash vocabularies

In the following, I introduce the earliest relics of the Chuvash language: Chuvash vocabularies and dictionaries emerged in the 18th century. Through this, we get a thorough picture on the historical and methodological background of the first Chuvash grammar.

¹ I thank Klára Agyagási from whom I got a continuous inestimable help during my work on the present study. English translation was made by Valéria Kulcsár.

1.1. Strahlenberg's vocabulary

The first written source of the Chuvash language is a short list of words made by Philipp Johann von Strahlenberg, published by the author in 1730, in Sweden as a part of the work entitled *Das nord- und ostliche Theil von Europa und Asia*. Strahlenberg was a Swedish military officer who was taken prisoner by the Russians in 1709, released in 1721 (Róna-Tas 1978: 71–73; Sergeev 1972: 49). During his year in prison, he got familiar with several regions of the Russian Empire, permanently taking notes. In his work, he gave the meaning of 60 words in 32 languages. However, his Chuvash list is, unfortunately, deficient, containing only 28 words (Jegorov 1949: 111). I should emphasise that already Strahlenberg assumed that the Chuvash belongs to the Turkic languages. His work and its English and French translations already in the 1730s drew the attention of the West to the existence of the Chuvash people.

1.2. Works by Müller and Fischer

In the 18th century, works by Johann Eberhard Fischer and Gerhard Friedrich Müller emerged. Both researchers took part in the 2nd Siberian expedition organised by the Saint Petersburg Academy of Sciences.² They were assigned to collect the language material of the non-Russian population of the Russian Empire. Müller conducted fieldwork between 1733 and 1740 – he must have made his vocabularies already in 1733 (Agyagási 1982a: 9) –, then Fischer followed him, returning to Saint Petersburg in 1747. Their activity resulted in a total of six dictionaries partly containing also Chuvash materials.³

Part of the documents made during the expedition lurked until the second half of the 20th century in Göttingen, and also in Petersburg. It seems that the most accurate Chuvash language data were included into Müller's work *Vocabularium harmonicum* published in 1759; probably, the Chuvash vocabulary published in Fischer's *Vocabularium continens...* was collected by him, but in the course of subsequent copying always got a growing number of inaccuracies (Hovdhaugen 1975: 276–279; Agyagási 1982a: 31–32). *Vocabularium harmonicum* preserved a total of 313 Chuvash words, including 38 numerals and six pagan male names (Jegorov 1949: 113). Based on them, Müller concluded that the Chuvash was a Turkic language, more precisely, a language similar to Tatarian. This work became internationally known. Among

2 Russian Academy of Sciences was founded by Peter I (Great) in 1724 in Saint Peterburg. One of the most important goals of the academic research was the geographical, ethnographical, and linguistic examination of the distant regions of the empire. 1st Siberian expedition of Daniel Gottlieb Messerschmidt served this task. Unfortunately, manuscripts made during this work were lost. It was followed by the 2nd Siberian expedition (to Kamchatka) between 1733 and 1747 (Agyagási 1982a: 8–9.).

3 Two of them were assigned to arrange and publish the documents made during the expedition. However, personal conflicts between the two researchers set back the common work. This situation, partly, explains why it is so difficult to use their published dictionaries and preserved manuscripts. For a detailed analysis of their story and contents, see Agyagási 1982a.

others, in 1775, György Pray noticed the similarity between certain Hungarian and Chuvash words due to it (Jegorov 1949: 115).

In 1969, Sergeev made basic assumptions on Fischer's work. He pointed out that among the 280 Chuvash lexemes of the *Vocabularum continens...* there are several words (e.g. personal pronouns) that do not occur in Müller's collection. He also emphasised that this list contains only Virjal data, and there is only a single Russian loanword (Sergeev 1969: 234–235).

1.3. Dictionaries by Tatiščev

Russian historian Tatiščev, who at that time was the director of the mining department in Ekaterinburg, studying the history and culture of the peoples living nearby, compiled, and sent out questionnaires to the territories under his authority three times (1734, 1737, 1739 – Agyagási 1982a: 10–11). These sheets contained 197 questions among which 107 ones concerned historical, geographical and economical data; questions 108–197 were especially arranged to get familiar with the culture and languages of the Volga and Siberian people.⁴ Received answers included several Chuvash vocabularies from which two dictionaries containing Chuvash word material were compiled: the *Russko-tatarsko-čuvaško-mordovskij slovar'* 'Russian-Tatar-Chuvash-Mordovian dictionary' and the *Russko-čuvaško-marijsko-mordovskij slovar'* 'Russian-Chuvash-Mari-Mordovian dictionary'. According to some suggestions, part of Tatiščev's questionnaires could be used also by Fischer (Agyagási 1982a: 11).

The Chuvash related questionnaire answers come from the territory of the Simbirsk district. This administrative unit existed from 1648 to 1780, including around 100 Chuvash villages lying on the southern part of modern Chuvashia and south of the modern border of the republic, in the vicinity of Petrovsk and Samara. According to the first census made in 1722–1723, in the district, there were 12,695 taxpaying Chuvash men and 4,401 ones providing military service (Dimitriev 1960: 271).

From the 1730s, that is to say, from the period when Tatiščev wrote his work, we have detailed data on the operation of the district office that can supply us with important background information on the source value of the questionnaires. There were around 160 people working at that time in the Simbirsk office: a colonel (*vojvoda*), a vice-colonel (*vice-vojvoda*), a secretary, a rapporteur, an office scribe, five clerks, four vice-clerks, eight copyists, six scribes and around 130 couriers. Besides, there was a notary office in the castle where an inspector and a scribe worked together with further ca. 30 office employees (Dimitriev 1960: 272).

Answers received for Tatiščev's questionnaires were compiled by the clerks of the chancellery who, not being specialists, handled the whole thing only as a new task to be solved, which they wanted to get rid off as soon as possible, using the minimum of

⁴ Dimitriev 1960: 270. During his work, Tatiščev several times asked for the support of the Academy but did not get any help from Saint Petersburg: Róna-Tas 1978: 74.

energy. The same was the approach of the Chuvash village principals ordered in as respondents. We know the names of some of them: Kizbahta Tojbulatov from village Alšejevo; Makar Armaneev from Bol’šoje Bujanovo; Bagirej Baitov from Išakovo; Jegor Petrov from Muratovo and Antip Tomeneev from Novye Algaši (Dimitriev 1960: 274). The Chuvashes – probably, not without any reason – had no confidence in any state body, so they tried to give short, neutral, sometimes directly false answers.⁵ This is especially true about the questions on their religion.

So, from ethnographic aspect, we should handle Tatiščev’s work only with a strong reservation, however, dictionaries based on his vocabularies contain valuable linguistic information. As I have mentioned before, two dictionaries were made from the lexical material of the questionnaires: the *Russko-tatarsko-čuvaško-mordovskij slovar’* and the *Russko-čuvaško-marijsko-mordovskij slovar’*. The first work contains 524, while the other somewhat less Chuvash lexemes. I should emphasise that these dictionaries were the first 18th-century Chuvash language relics that were written with Cyrillic letters.

The word material of Tatiščev’s works – similarly to other dictionaries written in this period – was divided into thematic groups including materials coming from both Anatri and Virjal respondents.⁶ The reason for the relatively variable dialectal features might be that in this period, the diffusion that went on in the Modern Age, sometimes aggressive resettling of the peoples of the Middle Volga Region has been already in progress, so, part of the Chuvash population of the Simbirsk District moved here from other places which can be detected in the dialectal heterogeneity.⁷

1.4. Word list by Kirak Kondrat’evič

It is worth to say some words about the, today lost, *Čuvaško-russkij leksikon* ‘Chuvash-Russian lexicon’ compiled together with five further dictionaries of the Volga languages between 1737 and 1739, by Kirak Kondrat’evič, a Latin teacher from Ekaterinburg. The most important question considering this work is whether Kondrat’evič used Tatiščev’s questionnaires, and whether he had anything to do with the anonymous author of the *Slovar’ jazyka čuvaškogo* ‘Dictionary of the Chuvash language’. Based on Kondrat’evič’s probable professional skills and his being familiar with the characteristics of the above mentioned two sources, Jegorov concluded that the *Čuvaško-russkij leksikon* could not have relationship with any of these, but was a work completely based on independent research (Jegorov 1949: 135).

5 For examples, see Dimitriev 1960: 275. Answers to questionnaires were published by Dimitriev 1960: 280–286.

6 Sergeev 1969: 232–233. For the comparison of the Chuvash word material coming from the two dictionaries with the answers to the original questionnaires, see Dimitriev 1960: 286–298.

7 Sergeev 1972: 53. Questionnaires containing Chuvash words came from the region of Samara, Petrovsk, and Dmitrievsk (Dimitriev 1960: 276).

1.5. The first Chuvash grammar

The first printed Chuvash grammar written in Russian and a supplementing word list including at least 1200 lexemes, the *Sočinenija prinadležaščie k grammatike čuvaškogo jazyka* ‘Writings belonging to the grammar of the Chuvash language’ was compiled on the command of the Kazan-Sviyazhsk bishop Venjamin (Pucek-Grigorovič). It was published in 1769 in Saint Petersburg.⁸ Relatively few special studies have been published about this work. Phonetic examination of the word material of the *Sočinenija* was partly conducted in 1981 by Klára Agyagási, however, until now, her dissertation has remained unpublished. Besides, Even Hovdhaugen (Hovdhaugen 1975) and O. A. Mudrak (Mudrak 2011) devoted a short study to the phonetic analysis of the grammar.

1.6. Dictionary of Damaskin

Renewed attention arose due to the conversion process, resulted in further scholarly works dealing with the Chuvash people. Publication of a pentalingual dictionary entitled *Slovar’ jazykov raznyh narodov v Nižgorodskoj eparhii* ‘Dictionary of the languages of different peoples belonging to the Nizhnij Novgorod Diocese’ can be put to 1785. It was edited by Damaskin (Dmitrij Semyonov-Rudnev), bishop of Nizhnij Novgorod and contained Russian, Tatar, Mordovian, and Cheremis words. The book counting 519 pages included 11,003 Chuvash expressions (Jegorov 1949: 120). Beside the great number of linguistic data, this work deserves special attention also because this was the first time when Chuvash ecclesiastic intellectuals probably took part in the compilation of a dictionary: Jermej Rožanskij, Grigorij Rožanskij, Ivan Rusanovskij, and Pjotr Taliev.⁹

Despite of it, the quality of the linguistic material of the *Slovar’ jazykov...* is far from excellent, so this work, unfortunately, does not represent good source value. Most part of the Chuvash words, more than half of them, are artificial words that emerged as the translation of Russian expressions not having really good equivalents in Chuvash. Besides, the use of Cyrillic letters that were not able to reflect the phonetical characteristics of the Chuvash language and transcription inaccuracies frequently resulted in phonetically uncertain, sometimes unintelligible words. Here we meet the worst deficiency of the Chuvash vocabularies: Cyrillic writing did not allow the ideal recording of the phonetic form of the Chuvash words. Native speaker compilers of the dictionary in question seemingly could not or did not want to overcome this problem. At the same time, the significance of the *Slovar’ jazykov...* is beyond doubt: there are archaisms and dialectological elements that by now disappeared from the Chuvash language (Jegorov 1949: 122–123).

⁸ For the detailed introduction of the grammar, see the next chapter.

⁹ Jegorov 1949: 121. As V.G. Rodionov pointed out, the name of the Kazan priest and translator Pjotr Taliev (1778–1832) got among the compilers of the *Slovar’ jazykov...* only due to a contemporary mistake, see Rodionov 1983: 163.

1.7. Slovar' jazyka čuvaškogo

In 1785, the *Slovar' jazyka čuvaškogo* 'Dictionary of the Chuvash language' containing 2888 Chuvash words was completed. The typography of the work, the phonetic and dialectological features of its word material suggest that the dictionary could have been printed in Kazan or Simbirsk (Jegorov 1949: 125). Until the present moment, no light was thrown on its author.

1.8. The "Catherine-dictionaries"

In 1784, empress Catherine II invited to Saint Petersburg the famous German zoologist and botanist Peter Simon Pallas, charging him with the collection of linguistic data in the hope of a later comparative dictionary. In the two-volume comparative dictionary by Pallas edited between 1787 and 1789 (that got to be known in the scholarship as Catherine-dictionary) a large number of Chuvash words were published (Sergeev 1972: 54–55). The *Sravnitel'nye slovari vseh jazykov i narečij* 'Comparative dictionaries of all the languages and dialects' contains equivalents of 285 words in 200 languages. In the improved, four-volume version of the work edited in 1790–1791, we find the same 285 Chuvash words (Jegorov 1949: 130–131). Sergeev thoroughly examined the circumstances of the compilation of the Catherine-dictionaries. In the archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences, five vocabularies including, among others, Chuvash words were preserved about which we know that Pallas used them during his work. Among these, the first two ones also contain Mari, Mordvinian, and Votyak material, the remaining three works are Russian-Chuvash vocabularies. The first and second word list was made by Mendier Bekdorin, the former contains 357, the latter 264 Chuvash expressions. These two lists probably served as drafts of the same work, because their word material completely overlaps each other (Sergeev 1969: 236). The authors of the third dictionary containing 129 words were Ivan Aleksandrov, an interpreter, retired vice-clerk from Kazan, and Vasilij Kostyčov, the president of the higher council of the Kazan lieutenancy. The fourth and fifth word list was also compiled by them, one including 285 and the other 278 words. The five word lists (because of the overlaps) contain a total of 375 – Anatri and Virjal – lexemes, out of which, finally 285 got into the Catherine-dictionaries (Sergeev 1969: 237).

Earlier, Jegorov made critical notes on the linguistic source value of the Chuvash word material of the *Sravnitel'nye slovari*. In his opinion, the large number of variable mistakes found in the work attest to the fact that the compilers were not qualified. Besides, the editing of the dictionary also leave much to be desired (Jegorov 1949: 131–133). At the same time, Savel'ev highlighted that part of lexemes considered by the earlier scholarship mistakenly recorded, is correct from etymological point of view (Savel'ev 2014: 19).

So, Catherine the Great's dictionaries do not represent a really high value as Chuvash linguistic sources, but their international impact is indubitable. It is enough to emphasise here that in 1796, Pál Beregszászi Nagy influenced by these works

recognised common features between certain Hungarian and Chuvash words (Jegorov 1949: 133).

1.9. Slova, vzjatye iz francuzskikh razgovorov

In the period between 1789 and 1791, in Saint Petersburg, the work under enigmatic title *Slova, vzjatye iz francuzskih razgovorov rossijskie s čuvaškimi raspoložennye po urokam* ‘Words loaned from French speech Russian and Chuvash arranged by lesson’ was published.¹⁰ This work is a primitive Russian-Chuvash language “coursebook” using the Russian lexeme material of a Russian-French word collection containing 130 lessons and compiled after its system. The *Slova* includes about 1500 Chuvash words (Jegorov 1949: 123), that – obviously following the *ad hoc* structure of the imitated work – are dispersed among the 130 “lessons” missing any logic, completely incidentally. In the “lessons”, beside the word lists, no further auxiliary material can be found that would place the words into context. The main value of the *Slova, vzjatye iz francuzskih...* is that it could have been prepared with the participation of the same ecclesiastic intellectuals – Grigorij Rožanskij and Ivan Rusanovskij – who can be connected also with the compilation of the dictionary published in Nizhnij Novgorod (Jegorov 1949: 124). Due to this, more or less the same transcription methods and same mistakes can be found in the word material of the two works.

1.10. Diary of Königsfeld

Tobias Königsfeld’s travel diary was published in 1779, in Amsterdam. He wrote it in 1740 during an astronomical expedition to Berezov. Königsfeld was one of the students of Joseph-Nicolas Delisle (Nikolaj Josif Delil), an astronomer from Saint Petersburg. During the expedition to Berezov – the aim of which was the observation (which was unsuccessful) of the Mercury passing in front of the Sun – they twice crossed the Chuvash lands calling at Kozmodemjansk (Dimitriev 1960: 277). Part of Königsfeld’s and Delisle’s travel diaries translated from the German to French was published in one of the volumes from the series *Histoire générale des voyages* (Róna-Tas 1978: 73–74). Abridged Russian translation of the French manuscript came out in 1849 in Saint Petersburg. In Königsfeld’s diary, we find a short description of the Chuvash folk customs, religion, material culture and some lexical material.¹¹

¹⁰ Transcription of the word material of the work has been recently done by Rodionov [w.p.y.]: 90–134.

¹¹ Relevant part of Königsfeld’s diary was published by Dimitriev 1960: 299–302.

1.11. The second Chuvash grammar

Though the second Chuvash grammar was born in the 19th century,¹² from the point of my study it seems worthwhile to shortly refer to it.

The second Chuvash grammar was published in 1836, in Kazan, under the title *Načertanie pravil čuvaškogo jazyka i slovar' sostavlennye dlja duhovnyh učilišč Kazanskoj eparhii* 'Drafts of the Chuvash language rules and dictionary compiled for the ecclesiastic schools of the Kazan diocese'. Its author has been unknown for a long time, but today we know that it can be connected to a priest of the Peter-Paul church of Kazan, Viktor Višnevskij. The descriptive grammar part of the *Nachertanie* practically completely is based on the system of the *Sočinenija*, however, its word list includes much more items, a total of 2736 Chuvash lexemes. Beside that, a Chuvash-Tatar-Mari comparative dictionary is also included into the publication.¹³

This second grammar and the four gospels published in 1820, in Chuvash made a fundament for Wilhelm Schott's work *De lingua Tschuwaschorum* that came out in 1841, in Berlin. Due to this work, Schott was elected the member of the Berlin academy of sciences,¹⁴ and starting from this, the Chuvash language became a key topic of the international turcological studies.

2. The first Chuvash grammar

2.1. Introduction of the work and its relationship with the Mari and Udmurt grammars

The first printed Chuvash grammar, *Sočinenija prinadležaščie k grammatike čuvaškogo jazyka* 'Studies belonging to the grammar of the Chuvash language' was published in 608 copies in May 1769, in Saint Petersburg (Mudrak 2011: III). Today, the book is a real rarity: presently only five copies are known, out of which two can be found in Moscow, two in Saint Petersburg and one in Budapest, in the library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Facsimile version of the book – accompanied with relatively few comments – was published in 2011, edited by A. P. Huzangaj in Cheboksary.¹⁵

12 A short list of the most important 18th–19th-century Chuvash language relics was published by Agyagási 1978: 17–20; Agyagási 1982b: 14–17.

13 For the detailed introduction into the second Chuvash grammar (focusing mainly on the descriptive grammar part), see Alekseev 1970: 207–215. Vishnevskij was also the author of the first Chuvash grammar book: Petrov 1967: 105.

14 For the scholarly activity of Wilhelm Schott, see the online database of the *A Pallas nagy lexikona* (Pallas's great lexicon): <http://www.arcanum.hu/hu/online-kiadvanyok/Lexikonok-a-pallas-nagy-lexikona-2/s-16BBE/schott-17312/> (viewed 3 May 2017).

15 During the analysis of the grammar I used this facsimile edition, see *Sočinenija* 2011. Its pdf version is available also on the internet: http://elbib.nbchr.ru/lib_files/0/kpch_0_0000012.pdf (viewed 3 February 2020).

As mentioned above, the compilation of the *Sočinenija* can be connected to the Orthodox conversions started in the second half of the 18th century in the Middle Volga Region, more concretely to the Kazan-Sviyazhsk bishop Pucek-Grigorovič (his ecclesiastic name: Venjamin). It may be worthwhile to go into details concerning the biography of the bishop playing central role in the emergence of the grammar. His life story represents well the age and the environment in which the work examined in this article came into existence.

Vasilij Grigorjevič Pucek-Grigorovič (ca. 1700–1785) was born in Lohvica (today: Ukraine) as a child of a Ukrainian military officer and a mother of Polish noble origin.¹⁶ Between 1728 and 1732, he was the student of the Kievan Theological Academy, from where, already in the latter year, he moved to Kazan to play an active role in priest training. First, he taught Latin and arithmetic in the Slavic-Latin school of the town, then, from 1739, he became the professor of the Kazan Theological Seminar. In 1740, he took monastic vow under the name Venjamin (Benjamin). He became the prefect of the school, then, from 1744, its rector. Besides, he continued vivid missionary activity, supported the work of the Office of the Newly Baptised founded in Kazan and competent in the territories of the Kazan, Astrakhan, Nizhnij Novgorod and Voronezh governorates. He took part in conversion journeys in Tatar, Chuvash, Mordvinian and Udmurt territories.

Between 1746 and 1748, he officiated masses in the Peter and Paul cathedral of Saint Petersburg. In the period of 1748–1753, he was the bishop of Nizhnij Novgorod and Alatyř. From 1753 until his death, he was the member of the Holy Synod. From 1753 to 1758, he held positions in the Tver and Kashin Bishoprics. Between 1758 and 1761, he was the bishop of Pskov, Narva and Izborsk, then, until 1762, the archbishop of Saint Petersburg. In the same year, he took part in the funeral of Peter III and coronation of Catherine II; he was appointed the bishop of Kazan. From then on, he again put great efforts for the conversion of the surrounding pagan peoples supporting, for example, the operation of a new school founded for the newly baptised. In this school, the students of the clerical seminary and newly baptised local inhabitants took part in the translation of the Bible and other theological texts to the Mari, Tatar, and Chuvash language. (Manuscripts written at this time perished in a fire in the 19th century.) The first Chuvash grammar introduced below was compiled in this period and milieu.

In 1774, Pugachov's army occupied Kazan. During the siege, bishop Venjamin organised processions, common prayers, and tried to convince the population not to join the revolt. Despite of it, after the fall of Kazan, he was accused with the support of the rebels and sent to jail. In 1775, he succeeded in clearing himself from the charges and got free. After that, Catherine II sent him a gift: a white headcover and a cross decorated with diamonds. (The story was later worked up by Pushkin.)

¹⁶ For bishop Venjamin's biographical data, see the online platform of the *Pravoslavnaja Enciklopedija* 'Orthodox Encyclopaedia' with further scholarship on archives and ecclesiastic history: <http://www.pravenc.ru/text/150309.html> (viewed 30 January 2020).

In 1782, Venjamin resigned from his office, and, until his death in 1785, lived in a monastery near Kazan.

So, from the second half of the 18th century, a serious conversion activity was going on in the Kazan diocese.¹⁷ In the framework of this process, on bishop Venjamin's command, the first Chuvash grammar was compiled in 1769. In 1770, it was followed by the Udmurt,¹⁸ and in 1775, by the Mari grammar.¹⁹ These three works were prepared based mostly on the same scheme, in all probability, as a part of the same plan. Beside the identical typography, structure, and the word material that partly overlapped each other in the three grammars, an obvious evidence for that is their common title: *Sočinenija prinadležaščie k grammatike čuvaškogo/čeremisskogo/votskogo jazyka* 'Studies belonging to the grammar of the Chuvash/Cheremis/Vot language'. At the same time, certain structural differences between the three works make it probable that their authors must have been different (Jegorov 1951: 86).

We do not know any of the authors of the grammars. Opposite to the other works, the *Sočinenija* does not indicate either the place of edition, or its year, so the scholarship has not had any information on these data for a long time. As to the year of edition, several authors suggested that it was published only in 1775, or may be, it was edited twice: in 1769 and 1775. Some scholars indicated Moscow as the place of edition, others – Saint Petersburg.²⁰ Finally, in 1959, V. T Terent'ev, then in 1967, V. D. Dimitriev found archive materials with the help of which they were able to answer these questions. So, today we already know that the grammar got to printing house in Saint Petersburg in January 1769, by direct order of bishop Pucek-Grigorovič, and the book was put to market from 23 May costing 23 kopeks (Terent'ev 1959: 139–140; Dimitriev 1967: 156).²¹

It is of special interest, that out of the three grammars, only the Chuvash one contains a preface which I consider important to cite completely for a better understanding of the questions discussed below: "When many, for different reasons, wish to learn the languages of not only close but also distant, not only of contemporary but also formerly existed peoples, then you should try to learn the languages of those people who live inside our home country among us and make the part of our society.

17 From 1731, a committee situated in Sviyazhsk was responsible for the conversion to Christianity in the Middle Volga Region. In 1740, it was transformed into the Office of New Christians' Affairs. The first serious conversion wave went on between 1743 and 1747. Its spectacular success was due, on the first hand, to the military aggression against the pagan population of the area and secondly, to the financial in-kind contributions. In Civilsk and Sviyazhsk, schools were founded for "newly baptised" children, then, from 1756, this education role was overtaken by Kazan. After the liquidation of the Office of New Christians' Affairs in 1767, the issue of education of newly baptised children was relocated to the authority of the Kazan and Nizhnij Novgorod dioceses (Komissarov 1992: 85–86).

18 For critical edition, see Décsy 1967.

19 For critical edition, see Sebeok 1956.

20 For scholarly debates on the place and time of the grammar's edition, see in detail, Dimitriev 1967: 154–156.

21 Archive documents connected with this question were published by Dimitriev 1967: 160–162.

Not only the curiosity but also the usefulness should inspire us which is evident for everybody who is involved. The author of the book deserves compliments indeed because he is the first to set an example. There is no doubt that there will be others to follow him in this matter. Those who take this assignment will get a vast field never ploughed before. And if we cannot expect any other use of it, then it would be enough to show them and make them realise that they are the parts of our body, they are our fellow-citizens and this is the way we consider them. Every beginning is frequently liable to mistakes, however, we should not fear that in some time they will not be corrected. So, we wish that we would reach the perfection which is necessary for rational people when starting any kind of work.²²

2.2. Research history of the first Chuvash grammar

The *Sočinenija* got into the focus of the Russian linguistic scholarship in the second half of the 20th century,²³ but up to now, no comprehensive analysis has been made despite of the fact that this was the very first Turcological work published in Russia. The method of linguistic description used by the authors followed the system of classical languages, mainly of the Latin grammars: eight parts of speech, five declension cases, designation of first-person singular of present tense forms of the verbs, and further numerous examples²⁴ show that though already Russian grammars were at disposal in the age, the compilers of the *Sočinenija* started off mainly from their own classical education.

22 „Когда многие для разных причин желают знать языки не только ближних, но и отдаленных, не только нынешних, но и прежде бывших народов; то кольми паче надлежит вам стараться довольно узнать языки тех народов, которые между нами внутри пределов единого отечества обитают и составляют часть общества нашего. Не одно нас любопытство, но и польза к тому поощрять должна, которая очевидна всякому, кто с ними обращается. Сочинитель книги сея похвалу заслуживает тем больше, что он первый подает пример. Нет сомнения, что и другие ему станут в сем деле последовать. Желающим труд сей на себя принять предлежит пространное поле, так сказать, никем от века еще неоранное. Есть ли же бы никакой другой оттуда пользы мы не могли ожидать; то не довольно ли и той одной только, чтобы сим способом показать им и вперить в них мысли, что они суть члены тела нашего, что они наши сограждане и что мы их иначе и не почитаем. Начало часто подвержено недостаткам; однако при сем нет той опасности, чтобы оные со временем не были исправлены без всякого ущерба. Желать остается, чтобы достигли мы в сем через сие до того совершенства, которое потребуетя от людей благоразумных при начинании всякого труда.” *Sočinenija* 2011: 2–3. In this preface, beside the probably really enlightened attitude of Pucek-Grigorič, we see the reflection of the thinking of the Catherine Age.

23 It was Jegorov’s work that drew attention to the grammar (Jegorov 1949); he was followed by the studies of D. D. Šamraj (Šamraj 1955), Terent’ev (Terent’ev 1959), Dimitriev (Dimitriev 1967), and Sergeev (Sergeev 1969).

24 For the descriptive linguistic method of the *Sočinenija*, see Jegorov 1951: 87–89, and Alekseev 1970: 204–206.

The work counting 68 pages, after the introduction introduces the system of the Chuvash language according to the parts of speech, in the form of tables. In the grammar, we find the following chapters: nouns (682), adjectives (158), numerals (23), pronouns (150), verbs (350), conjunctions, interjections and other frequently used expressions (23). Each grammatical unit is followed by a thematically arranged word list: the *Sočinenija* contains a total of 1368 Chuvash lexemes (Huzangaj 2011: VIII), out of which only relatively few (25–30) are Russian loanwords (Jegorov 1951: 91).²⁵

Scientific value of the *Sočinenija* is further enhanced by the fact that its word material was recorded surprisingly uniformly, and, in addition – according to the scholarship – suitably to the Virjal, that is to say, the archaic dialect of the Chuvash language (Jegorov 1951: 90; Huzangaj 2011: IV–V; Mudrak 2011: II). Jegorov who was the first dealing with the grammar, concluded that the lexical material of the word lists suggest that they were recorded in the dialect of the Krasnye Četai district (NW part of Chuvashia) (Jegorov 1949: 117; Jegorov 1951: 90). Sergeev approached the question in a more delicate way. In his opinion, the dominance of the Virjal word material can be caught on phonetic, lexical, and grammatical level, but at the same time, he highlighted that the 20th-century dialectical borders cannot be, in all cases, projected back to 200 years (Sergeev 1969: 229). Starting from some characteristic phonetical examples, he suggested among the respondents of the grammar, speakers of further Virjal dialects who used the dialects of Šundir, Morgauš, Jadrin and Urmar areas (Sergeev 1969: 230–231).²⁶ He also brought further parallels from Chuvash “diasporas” around Uljanovsk, Samara and Saratov. In his opinion, Anatri elements can be found in the vocabularies of the grammar only sporadically concerning almost exclusively the lexical material (Sergeev 1969: 231).

2.3. Hypotheses on the authors of the first Chuvash grammar

From time to time, the question who and how wrote/compiled the first Chuvash grammar emerges in the scholarship. In Jegorov’s studies who was the first to form an opinion, we find heavy self-contradictions. According to him, we should count with a Virjal recorder and Anatri editor (Jegorov 1949: 117; Jegorov 1951: 90),²⁷ but at the same time, he himself pointed out several mistakes that refer to the fact that people playing determining role in the compilation of the work could not be Chuvash native speakers (Jegorov 1949: 117; Jegorov 1951: 89). On phonetical, morphological, and lexical level the word material of the *Sočinenija* contains many mistakes and inaccuracies evidencing that the compiler or compilers of the work, though trying to get profound knowledge in Chuvash language, were presumably Russian native

25 This is a fact well representing the not really significant Russian influence concerning the Chuvash language at that time.

26 These areas lie at the northernmost part of Chuvashia, by the Volga.

27 Almost the same opinion was repeated by L.P. Sergeev in 1969 (Sergeev 1969: 232).

speakers.²⁸ Without getting into details, it is to be emphasised that during the recording of the words, the most difficulties emerged because Cyrillic set of letters did not allow the recording of phonetical characteristics of the Chuvash language. The compilers of the vocabularies, though they tried to be consequent, did not make any attempt to solve this situation.²⁹

There are further arguments for the Russian native language of the *Sočinenija*'s compilers. It is improbable that Chuvash recorders would make basic grammar mistakes when describing the grammatical system of the grammar, mainly in the case of conjugation (Jegorov 1949: 117). The same is the situation with the Chuvash equivalents of some Russian words where, in many cases, we meet misunderstandings, inaccurate, only approximate meanings, confusion of parts of speech.³⁰

In 1967, Dimitriev made low-key and time-proven conclusions on the circumstances of the compilation of the first Chuvash grammar. The most important was the examination of the questions connected with the author of the *Sočinenija*. In his opinion, there are no data showing that Pucek-Grigorovič personally wrote any of the three grammars (on this matter, the biographers of the bishop do not say anything).³¹ It is much more probable that he took part in the coordination of these activities. To support this assumption Dimitriev brought the example of the process of editing of the *Slovar' jazykov raznyh narodov v Nižegorodskoj eparhii* 'Dictionary of the languages of different peoples belonging to the Nizhnij Novgorod Diocese' published in 1785: from the preface of this work, we learn that it was compiled by the priest professors and students of the Nizhnij Novgorod theological seminar, under the supervision of bishop Damaskin (Dimitriev 1967: 157). If the efforts of several people were necessary for the compilation of one dictionary, this is especially true for one – and more than that: three – grammars, the creation of which is a much more complicated task than the editing work of a dictionary.

So, it is probable that the *Sočinenija* emerged as a result of the work of several writers, consultants, and respondents. Most of the contributors must have been teachers and students of the Kazan theological seminar and of the school founded for the newly baptised, among whom there could have already been many Chuvash native

28 For details, see Takács 2020: 204–218.

29 Of course, this is a question, what can be expected from a, though educated, but not native speaker recorder who is charged with an unexperienced task, unsupported by earlier examples. Was he able to provide a relevant solution for the accurate description of the phonetics of a language earlier unknown for him? Especially, if we take into consideration that other evidently Chuvash native speakers could not resolve this problem either.

30 For these, with concrete examples, see Jegorov 1951: 88–90.

31 Researchers of all the three grammars mostly agree on this matter: Jegorov 1951: 86; Sebeok 1956: 13; Galkin 1991: 11. As an exception, we can refer to the opinion of the Votyak grammar's publisher, Gyula Décsy according to which the work went on this way: Pucek-Grigorovič "sat down with his Votyak students", and after their long interrogation prepared the work. According to Décsy, the bishop could have followed the same method when writing the Mari and Chuvash grammar, and because of the "teamwork" character of the task, did not indicate either his or his respondents' names (Décsy 1976: 3).

speakers. According to the sources, already from the 1730s, Chuvash students were admitted to the Kazan clerical seminary. Judging from the records made between 1765–1769, in the school for newly baptised, 40–45% (!) of several classes came out of Chuvash students meaning 44–58 graduates yearly. The most talented of them continued their studies in the theological seminary and many took clerical service: e.g. in 1767, 10 persons, in 1770, 9, in 1772, 13, and in 1773, 11 (Dimitriev 1967: 159). In the time of the emergence of the *Sočinenija*, all of the teachers working in the school for newly baptised spoke one or more languages of the Middle Volga Region. So, most of the professors and students of the school and of the clerical seminaries had the efficiency necessary for certain work phases of compilation of the three grammars.

Rodionov, in his study published in 1983, formulated a viewpoint completely different from the previous ones. According to him, the writer of the first Chuvash grammar was the Chuvash priest, translator, and poet Jermej Rožanskij who took part also in the compilation of the *Slovar' jazykov raznyh narodov v Nižegorodskoj eparhii*.

Jermej Ivanov (he took the name Rožanskij during his theological studies) was born in 1741, in a little village near Kurmyš (Northern Chuvashia).³² Already his father was a priest taking active role in the conversion of the local population.³³ Rožanskij studied in the theological seminary of Nizhnij Novgorod between 1751 and 1758. In 1765, Christian Chuvashes from the Kurmyš and Jadrin district asked Feofan, the bishop of Nizhnij Novgorod for a permission to appoint a local, Chuvash native speaking preacher: Jermej Rožanskij, a local Chuvash native speaker. After the bishop's permission, Rožanskij settled in Kumyš and lived there until his death at the beginning of the 19th century. Beside his conversion work, he actively translated, dealing also with literature and poetry. In 1785, together with his son Grigorij, he took part in the works of the *Slovar' jazykov raznyh narodov...* He was the first to publish a book in the Chuvash language, the *Kratkij katehizis, perevedennyj na čuvaškij jazyk* 'Short catechesis translated to the Chuvash language' printed in 1800, in Saint Petersburg (Rodionov 1983: 158).

In Rodionov's opinion, the dictionary part of the *Sočinenija* must have been compiled by several people, but for the descriptive grammar chapters, one person's work was enough. This person should not be necessarily identified with bishop Pucek-Grigorovič. According to Rodionov, the identity of the grammar's author can be ascertained judging from four parameters: 1. the author was knowledgeable in the dialect of Krasnye Četai district; 2. he was a Chuvash native speaker; 3. he knew well Latin, so he presumably learned in a clerical seminary; 4. after graduation, he must

32 For data on Jermej Rožanskij, see Rodionov 1983: 160–162.

33 This was a difficult task: there were several cases of armed resistance against the newly converted Christians. Conversion must have been eased when in 1764, it was promised to the inhabitants of Kozmodemiansk, Cheboksary and Kazan districts that their children would not be enlisted if they get baptised and attend school (Rodionov 1983: 158, 161).

have had enough experience for writing a scholarly work. Rodionov thought that all these statements without exception were true about Jermej Rožanskij, who can be firmly identified with the author of the *Sočinenija* (Rodionov 1983: 168).

Rodionov tried to support his assumption also with more sophisticated arguments. Among them, he argued that Rožanskij, as the native of the Kurmyš district, spoke the dialect of Krasnye Četai, besides, he received high level theological education, that is to say, he possessed the classical knowledge necessary for the writing of the grammar. Rodionov noted, though without supporting this with facts, that we do not know any Chuvash student from Kazan in the period of the emergence of the *Sočinenija*, who knew the dialect of Krasnye Četai (Rodionov 1983: 170). He highlighted that there are similarities in the character of word recording between the *Sočinenija* and *Slovar' jazykov raznyh narodov...* in the compilation of which Jermej Rožanskij demonstrably took part. A piece of further evidence by Rodionov is that out of 33 randomly chosen words of the Chuvash grammar starting with letter *b*, 12 ones completely correspond from a formal point of view to their equivalents recorded in 1785,³⁴ besides, there are overlappings between artificial words appearing in both works.³⁵ As a clincher, he noted that in the two dictionaries in question, the recorder of the words, denotes the *g* voiced velar plosive not with its Cyrillic equivalent but with Latin letter *g*.³⁶ According to him, this writing technique cannot be detected in the works written in the Kazan seminary.

Rodionov's set of arguments is objectionable in several points. He completely ignored the assumptions of the earlier scholarship, so he did not attend to introduce the facts contradicting his theory, neither did he disconfirm the evidence concluded from these facts. The worse deficiency of his work is that he does not explain why the author of the grammar should be accepted as a Chuvash native speaker, while in the work, there is a great number of mistakes that strongly question whether it was written, edited or at least proofread by a Chuvash person. It is enough to mention, it is highly improbable that Jermej Rožanskij, or any other Chuvash native editor, would have made systematic mistakes in conjugation, add Russian adjectival suffixes to Chuvash adjectives, or was not able to determine which part of speech some Chuvash words belonged to.

Rodionov's efforts for the comparison of the lexical material of the *Sočinenija* and the *Slovar' jazykov raznyh narodov...* can be only praised. At the same time, it should be emphasised that less than 40 words chosen from the lists of the grammar *ad hoc*, are not suitable for any conclusions, taking into consideration that the *Slovar' jazykov raznyh narodov...* contains 11,000 (eleven thousand) Chuvash lexemes, half of which is a technical term. However, the "analytical effort" of the author draws our attention

34 For examples, see Rodionov 1983: 168–169.

35 For examples, see Rodionov 1983: 170–171.

36 For examples, see Rodionov 1983: 169.

to a sad fact: the neglected situation of the comparative linguistic examination of the 18th-century Chuvash language relics.³⁷

The author's system of arguments concerning the use of Latin letter *g* remains incomplete for similar reasons. In connection with the Pallas dictionaries, already Jegorov proved in 1949, that not only Rožanskij used this letter (Jegorov 1949, 132). Moreover, we know by name the compilers of these dictionaries: Vasilij Kostyčov and Ivan Aleksandrov; and it is also known that they came from Kazan (Sergeev 1969, 237). So, opposite of Rodionov's assumption, the use of letter *g* was also known in Kazan, we meet it also in the Mari and Votyak editions of the *Sočinenija*. And even Rodionov does not suggest that the latter two works had been written by Rožanskij.

Assumption according to which in the 1760s, there was not a single student speaking the Krasnye Četai dialect, is included into Rodionov's argumentation in a somewhat incoherent way. This statement cannot be considered serious in the light of Dimitriev's studies, who pointed out that already dozens of Chuvash native speakers studied in this time in different Kazan schools or took clerical service. Between 1756 and 1767, by the way, in the Middle Volga region, only in Kazan operated a school for newly baptised students (Komissarov 1992: 86),³⁸ so Chuvash children entering the Russian system of education must have started their studies in Kazan. According to Sergeev's research, there were many of them who spoke different Virjal dialects, because the *Sočinenija* – opposite of Rodionov's assumption – preserved lexical elements of several Virjal (and at least one Anatri) dialects (Sergeev 1969: 230–231).

Rodionov's last argument supporting the authorship of Rožanskij, is the assumption that the writer of the grammar, probably, was a priest with classical education and good knowledge of Latin; no other person except for Rožanskij had all these characteristics. Concluding from only a basic knowledge of the clerical history of the age and region, we can state, that these qualities made a part of the cultural basis gained as a result of the clerical education. A lot of people, the name of whom has not remained for the posterity, possessed these.

In his study published in 1999 and republished in 2009, N. P. Petrov considered Rodionov's results as accepted ones despite their doubtful scholarly value. According to him, the first and second known poem in Chuvash, published in Kazan without author also can be connected to Jermej Rožanskij, because words *ання* 'mother', *парня* 'present' and *хубер* 'happiness' were written with the same writing mood as in the first Chuvash grammar (Petrov 1999: 112). Moreover, going further with all these, he assumed that the compiler of the *Slovar' jazyka čuvaškogo* was also Rožanskij, because the word *хубер* was as well included into this work (Petrov 1999: 113). (True,

37 In the scholarship, assumptions on the dialectal origin of the word material of the first Chuvash grammar, and comparisons with further 18th-century grammars were made by Jegorov 1949; Sergeev 1969; Hovdhaugen 1975; Róna-Tas 1978; Agyagási 1982a; Agyagási 1982b.

38 From this period, we have data on 320 "newly baptised" students learning in Kazan, out of which more than 200 graduated. This number seems to be explicitly high and, at the same time, shows a sad picture of the age taking into consideration that more than 60 students passed away before graduation: Kappeler 2016: 76.

that in the form *хуберниѣ*, that is to say, supplied with a Russian adjectival suffix, in other words, in a basically mistaken form, which was pointed out by the author himself, though, he did not draw the adequate conclusion: the person recording the word probably was not a Chuvash native speaker.)

To-date, connecting printed Chuvash language relics multiplying at the end of the 18th century, to Jermej Rožanskij became part of the “mainstream” of the Chuvash scholarship. It is well symbolised by the fact that the entry on Rožanskij in the four-volume *Čuvaškaja enciklopedija* ‘Chuvash Encyclopaedia’ published in 2006, was written by Rodionov, in which he assumed that Rožanskij and Pucek-Grigorovič wrote together the first grammar (Grigor’ev 2006: 576). Huzangaj’s preface to the facsimile edition of the *Sočinenija* published in 2011, though in a low key, mainly echoes Rodionov’s arguments (Huzangaj 2011: VI–VII). Rodionov’s recently published online writing contains a short 18th-century collection of sources on Rožanskij’s activity (Rodionov [w.p.y.]: 136–151), unfortunately not supplied with comments. At the same time, it can be assumed from the study that there is no even indirect information showing that the priest of Kurmyš had anything to do with the first Chuvash grammar or that he at least was personally acquainted with Pucek-Grigorovič.

We might not be mistaken suggesting that the “Rožanskij fashion” recently taken its flight in Chuvashia is rather one of the symptoms of the Chuvash identity seeking, than a real scholarly leap forward.

In all likelihood, the identity of the person or persons finalising the *Sočinenija* never will be cleared with complete certainty. However, it is worthwhile to go back for a moment to the only primary source connected with it, the preface of the work cited above. It suggests that the contemporaries connected the emergence of the work to an anonymous author who, on the basis of the context of the text, was not a Chuvash native speaker. It is less than likely that it was Pucek-Grigorovič, however, it might not be a groundless presumption that the also anonymous author of the preface of the grammar was the spiritual father of the work, and the indirect supervisor of the edition.

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