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ON THE 90TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BIRTH OF V. A. MUCHIN

It is a great pity that the name of Vladimir Muchin (Savi) is little known in Finno-Ugric studies. He was a gifted researcher and an outstanding specialist who highly valued his native language, but he left hardly any theoretical works. This is due to the fact that in the conditions prevailing in the 1920s and 1930s he had to deal mostly with practical problems.

Like many representatives of the Mari intelligentsia of the first generation, Muchin was deeply interested in linguistics, which at that time was extremely popular among intellectuals. And it is no wonder that he, one of the leaders and creators of Mari autonomy, struggled for the rebirth of the native language.

Muchin was born in 1888 in the Morki Region of the present-day Mari A.S.S.R. He finished the local village school with honours and entered the Kazan teachers' training seminary for children of national minorities — the only educational institution open to a Mari at that time. After graduating from it he worked as a teacher in many villages. Muchin translated poems and short stories from Russian into Mari. He tried his hand at writing works in his native language. Probably at that time he understood for the first time in his life the meaning and the role of the native language in the reconstruction of the life of an oppressed people. Then he proposed the idea of publishing books, newspapers and magazines in the Mari language and circulating them among the peasantry and intelligentsia. Put at that time all this could be only a dream. In 1918 he was appointed the first editor of the newspaper «Йошкар кече». As an editor of «Йошкар кече» he, with his good knowledge of colloquial speech, was able to combine the colloquial folk and the literary language in his paper so that people accepted it as if it was something plain and familiar. And it was by no means easy to create such a language because of the dialectal differences. The language of the newspaper edited by Muchin was characterized by the expressive simplicity of colloquial folk speech and at the same time it was elaborated according to the norms of the literary language.

In the 1920s Muchin undertook a closer study of linguistic problems. This period of time was characterized by the movement for the «realization of the Mari language». It included the practical solution of the problems of language planning, and, in particular, of turning Mari into the official language of the region; the enrichment of the literary language with new words, the improvement of its spelling, grammar and lexical norms. These years were rather difficult for him because Muchin graduated first as an external student from Kazan University where he studied chemistry and biology, and then from the post-graduate courses in Moscow (philosophy). Muchin was an active participant in the work of language planning, being a head of the regional Department of Education and a member of the Committee on the Realization of the Mari Language he put into practice the language policy of the Socialist state. He was the initiator of many reforms in language planning.

Muchin's contribution to Mari linguistics can be considered from three aspects: 1) he tried to create a single national language, 2) he enriched the language lexically, 3) he improved the alphabet and spelling rules.

The first special article on the problem of a single national language was published in 1922 in the journal «У ильш» (1922, No. 5—6, pp. 26—28). He maintained that the conditions were favourable for the creation of the literary language on the basis of the Meadow dialect. He considered this dialect to be more or less uniform and, besides, 1) it is more or less comprehensible to everyone speaking the Mari language, and 2) it represents the majority of the Mari population and is spread over the vast territory of the republic. In the report «On the ways of the development of the Mari language» which was delivered at the II Congress of Educational Workers in 1925, he reaffirmed his idea of the expediency of creating a single literary language on the basis of the Meadow dialect and he also advanced new arguments in support of his standpoint. Muchin considered that the conditions necessary for achieving a single literary language were an increase of the number of publications, teaching children at school in their mother tongue, and the widespread use of the language as a means of communication on a state level. His views determined to a great extent the directions of language development at this or that stage. At that time there was a strong movement in favour of recognizing the Mari language as an official means of communication in the region. And we owe it to Muchin that this has been achieved. In the latter half of the 1920s V. A. Muchin was appointed a member of the Mari linguistic committee and took an active part in preparing the draft project of a single literary language which had as its aim the achievement of mutual understanding between the representatives of Hill Mari and Meadow Mari. He made speeches before the people using this «mixed» language. Muchin was a staunch supporter of the idea of the need for and the possibility of creating a single literary language and contributed greatly to the development of this movement. He considered a single literary language to be a powerful means of cultural and national revival.

The creation of a single literary language was not an end in itself and it was not a question of the nation's prestige. A single language was needed for uniting the whole Mari nation into a single Socialist nation. The language was a weapon in the struggle for a new life, it was necessary as a means of involving the working people in active political life.

Muchin paid serious attention to the enrichment of the vocabulary of the language. He understood that because of its drawbacks resulting from tsarist chauvinistic policy the Mari language could hardly meet the demands of developing life. He knew well the educational level of the Mari people at that time and that is why he had a clear idea of the ways of enriching the vocabulary of their language. Unlike other persons working in the field of language planning he did not indulge in excessive borrowing and avoided puristic tendencies. He demanded 1) the maximum use of the word-building possibilities of the Mari language; 2) the translation of loanwords on analogy with highly developed languages, Russian in particular; 3) the widening of the meanings of existing words; 4) the use of the word stock of the dialects which did not form the basis of the literary language.

Word creation on the basis of the words of the native language was viewed as one of the most important conditions of raising the value of the literary language. His own contribution to the enriching of the language can be seen in the linguistic terms he coined, in lists of words created by him and published on the pages of periodical publications, in the Russian-Mari Dictionary (1928) (he was one of its authors and editors). All these words were created from the resources of his native language and many of them were rather felicitous.

Muchin appealed to linguists not to be afraid of unusual words and phrases. But he insisted that before they were used in speech they should be adapted to the norms of the language. It was necessary that these words should fuse with the folk language and would not be alien to it, that they would not confuse ardent supporters of the purity of the native language. Therefore word formation was considered by Muchin of great

importance. It must be mentioned that he did not reject the idea of borrowing from Russian. But he considered it to be only a subsidiary means. The post-revolutionary period gave rise to a great number of new notions for the expression of which the Mari language did not have the corresponding linguistic means. To create new words for all of them from its own resources meant to doom the Mari language to complete linguistic isolation, on the one hand, and, on the other, it was practically impossible because of the lack of word-building means in the Mari language. Muchin clearly understood this and was sure that borrowing would be one of the effective means of enriching the vocabulary, especially the terminology of the Mari language. He also revealed a correct understanding of language correlations in the phonetic shaping of borrowings. He tried to adjust the borrowed words to the inherent laws of the Mari language.

Muchin insisted upon closer bonds being forged between the literary and folk-colloquial speech. He was against unsystematic word-building that neglected the language of the people. In the second half of the 1920s the creation of an official-business style was considered of prime importance. This phenomenon was quite new to the Mari language; that was why many artificial, difficult clichés and constructions and alien phrases began to appear. Muchin demanded that the official-business language should not lose touch with living colloquial speech. He warned against turning the Mari language into a red-tape language. But sometimes he himself did not follow this principle. For example, in the striving to use the creative opportunities of the native language to the full he saw some invented tendency to nationalism. At the same time he himself was often carried away by the creation of new words. His linguistic terminology testifies to this fact.

In 1930 he became the director of the Mari Scientific Research Institute; at that time language planning became entirely the task of this institution. His linguistic activity is characterized by the following two features which are the two sides of one and the same problem: 1) the study of the dialects of the Mari language, and 2) the elaboration of the problems of the alphabet and orthography. At that period he became a true leader of the language-planning movement. After the Mari Scientific Research Institute had been founded, his attitude towards the problem of the perfection of the language was changed. It was characterized by a more scientific approach to the formation of literary norms. Under the scientific guidance of Muchin the study of the Mari dialects was undertaken and subordinated to the interests and needs of the literary language.

He was the head of and an active participant in a whole number of dialect study expeditions. Such expeditions were sent to investigate all the dialect groups. A large amount of material was collected. Special attention was paid to the accessibility of the literary language to the bearers of these dialects. Parallel with the solution of practical tasks these expeditions solved important theoretical problems of Mari dialectology. As a result of the expedition of 1937, Muchin suggested that the Sañčursk-Jaransk dialect (the present-day north-west dialect) should be distinguished as belonging to a separate group.

In 1932 Muchin proposed a programme of the study of the Mari language. He suggested setting up seven basic items (embracing all the important dialectal groups) for the study of dialects from the point of view of literary language formation. And in a short annotation to one dialectal expedition Muchin defined 23 dialects in the Mari language (which, by the way, does not quite correspond to reality). Muchin was sure that the slow development and spread of the literary language was due to the large number of dialects.

Speaking about his activities, we have to mention his work on improving the alphabet and spelling. He took no part whatsoever in the attempts to latinize the Mari alphabet undertaken in 1930—31. But when this movement died down, he tackled the problem of perfecting Mari orthography. In 1932 this problem was discussed at a special meeting where it was decided to put an end to the attempts of latinizing the alphabet. The task of finding out the main direction of the further development of orthography and the alphabet was entrusted to Muchin. Fulfilling this task V. A. Muchin and

I. S. Kapitonov prepared a draft of a unified alphabet and orthography. The essence of this improvement was as follows: the letters *e*, *ë*, *ю*, *я*, *ф*, *х*, *у*, *щ* were included in the alphabet and the letter combinations *йэ*, *йе*, *йу*, *йа* were dropped. We believe that the introduction of these letters into the Mari alphabet was necessary. But the authors of the draft should have taken into consideration the principle of a differentiated approach. The main principle of the improvement — the bringing together of Mari orthography and Russian orthography was not good either. This approach seemed to be the most expedient scientific solution of the problem at that time, but nowadays we can clearly see its absurdity.

There is no denying the fact that the Mari orthography adopted in 1925 was in great need of improvement. The authors of the project made attempts to do this. But Muchin and his supporters were too ardent in breaking with traditions. Everybody who took part in the discussion before a new linguistic conference spoke against the project, especially against replacing the letter combinations *йэ*, *йе*, *йу*, *йа* by the letters *e*, *ë*, *ю*, *я*, and writing the letter *e* instead of *э* in all cases.

While rejecting the main principle of the draft, one should not overlook some felicitous points in its rules. This refers in particular to the spelling of Russian borrowings, to the unification of the spelling of some forms (e.g. unstressed vowels in the middle of words such as *курык* instead of *курук*, *мундыр* instead of *мундур*; the omission of the letter *й* at the end of a word — *шу* instead of *шуй*, the designation of the palatalization of *н* and *л* without any special signs, the writing together of the postpositions *ден* and *гыч*, etc.). The suggestion that the last reduced unstressed vowels should be indicated in all cases by means of *u* is welcome as it helps to bring the two variants of the written language (Meadow and Hill Mari) closer together.

The draft produced by Muchin and Kapitonov was not adopted by the linguistic conference held in January 1937. But in 1938, as a result of a language reform (which was based on this draft) it found practical application. But Muchin could no longer know about this.

In 1938 his life came to an abrupt end when he was still full of strength and energy. Muchin was an extremely gifted person. He was a leader of the movement to develop the Mari language, who concerned himself mainly with practical problems of the realization of the language. He was the author of many books for schools, he wrote many works on economics, philosophy, history, folklore, music and folk medicine. He was also highly appreciated as a writer. Muchin made an important contribution to the culture of the Mari people.