

# The Chuvash Postposition *valli* and the Mari Postposition *verč*: Focusing on the Case Marking of the Preceding Elements

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Chuvash (Oghur branch, Turkic) and Mari (Finno-Ugric, Uralic) are distributed in the Middle Volga region, Russia. The contact between them has been extremely close, leading to a profound symbiosis (Johanson 2000). This study focuses on postpositions that express purpose in both languages (Chuvash: *valli*, Mari: *verč*).

Despite the difference that the Chuvash *valli* only expresses purpose, while Mari *verč* also expresses reason, they are similar in that the preceding element can be marked either by nominative, dative (Mari) / dative-accusative (Chuvash), or genitive case (e.g., Chuvash: *xaläx/xaläx-a valli* [people.NOM/people-DAT.ACC for] “for people”, *un/äna valli* [that.GEN/that.DAT.ACC for] “for that”; Mari: *kaläk/kaläk-lan verč* [people.NOM/people-DAT for] “for people”, *tudən/tudlan verč* [that.GEN/that.DAT for] “for that”). Is this similarity caused by language contact? Since frequency patterns can also be borrowed in language contact (Johanson 2002), this study aims to answer this question by clarifying the frequency of the case markings the preceding elements take.

Although previous studies (Sergeev et al. 2012 on Chuvash, Riese et al. 2017 on Mari) describe the conditions and frequency of the occurrence of each case form, the description is considered to be insufficient.

In this study, a corpus-based quantitative survey was conducted. The corpora used are The corpus of the Chuvash language (size: 9.4 million words) and Meadow Mari Corpora (size: 2.3 million words). Both corpora are mainly composed of articles on the internet.

The survey revealed the following two similarities in the frequency of each case form: 1) In both languages, nouns appear mostly in the nominative form (Chuvash 96%, Mari 97%), with only a few dative/dative-accusative forms (Chuvash 4%, Mari 3%) and very rarely in the genitive form; 2) Pronouns in both languages appear more frequently in genitive or dative/dative-accusative forms (Chuvash 79%, Mari 77%) than in the nominative (Chuvash 21%, Mari 23%). Additional features of pronouns, in both languages, include the rare usage of reflexive pronouns in the genitive form and the personal pronouns in the nominative form.

Although the functions of both postpositions are not completely identical, the present study argues that the three-way case marking of the preceding element is quite possibly a similarity emerged due to language contact, because the distribution of each case form is too similar to be coincidental. This argument can also be supported by the fact that this type of three-way case marking in the preceding element of postpositions expressing purpose is not found in cognate or neighboring languages.

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