

Mari ethnic value system

The aim of this article is to reveal and describe the Mari ethnic value system which constitutes one of the leading subsystems of ethnic identity.

Ethnic identity is generally viewed as collective ethnic consciousness (Sadokhin 2004: 198–205; Stefanenko 2004: 20–31), which is predominantly manifested through the following psychological functions: thinking and feeling; sensation and intuition; volition and will (Jung 1981: 408–487). The main outcomes of cognitive psychological processes and emotional reactions are kept in a nation's memory in different forms, folklore genres included.

We regard ethnic identity as similarity of ethnic culture to itself. In this article culture is treated from P. Sorokin's viewpoint as a certain system of elements, incorporating language, religion, morals, art, science and technology (Sorokin 2006: 33–35). Ethnic culture identity is defined by its most conservative components accumulated by the ethnos on the territory of its living during centuries. These components can be obtained from folklore texts of various genres, mainly from proverbs and sayings as texts embodying nation's wisdom. Mari folklore genres attracted much attention of foreign scholars and were analysed from different angles and with diverse aims (Cf.: Bereczki 1998: 77–87).

The research has shown that the innermost part of the nation's past experience is organized into three leading subsystems: a subsystem of images, a subsystem of symbols and a subsystem of values. They show the character of nation's feeling and thinking. The subsystems have been reconstructed from such Mari folklore genres as songs (2 118), proverbs and sayings (2 100), myths (169) and proper personal names (9 348) (Glukhov, Glukhova 2007).

In the article the subsystem of values (hereinafter referred as a system) reconstructed from proverbs and sayings is scrutinized (Ibatov 1953; Gracheva 2001; Kitikov 2004). The investigation includes methodological basis of the systems theory which, in its turn, involves a decision making theory and a theory of values. A dichotomy method, factor and statistical analysis are also applied to the material together with componential (semantic) and contextual analysis.

Different nations' values are not the same and this fact may lead to misunderstanding when peoples come into contact. Therefore knowledge of ethnic values is of great significance, first of all for the prevention of interethnic tension and conflicts. It is axiomatic that there are universal moral standards, principles and norms but the importance and systemic ties among them are different. Needless to say, that the values of every nation do not exist separately but are organized into a system. In it all of them are interconnected and differ from each other by the degree of importance to the people.

The term "value" is understood in different ways. Dictionaries define it both as

- abstract concepts of worth, principle standards or qualities considered worthwhile or desirable, and

- material objects (e.g. an apartment, a car, a precious ring or painting, etc.). In a word — what we think is good or significant to us.

The values expressed in Mari proverbs and sayings refer to a sphere of notions, standards and qualities, but not to material realm of life.

Study of the values of individuals and social groups, not to mention the whole society, is difficult. The fundamental problem is to find proper indicators of a given value.

Proverbs and sayings in Mari culture are used in their direct and figurative meanings, therefore semantic analysis of these texts is complemented by factor analysis, a statistical data method used to reduce number of variables (values in our case) and to see their interrelation. The essence of the applied technique lies in the distribution of proverbs and sayings into groups by the type of values (factors) expressed in them and in further calculation of the value mention in each group.

Number of values will be different and dependent on their significance to the nation. The more important the value is the more often it is mentioned in the texts. This allows the operation of ranking values in order of their priority which

- shows a system of priorities;
- differentiates values by their importance;
- predicts the choice of values in concrete situations.

One more reason for such method choice and therefore the further taxonomy of factors lies in the fact that each value represents a certain goal to be achieved. Owing to a limited number of human resources (time, space, energy, etc.) one has to inevitably choose among the values. Therefore it is suggested that all mentioned values should be divided into four groups: I – main, II – auxiliary, III – additional, IV – insignificant. The classification follows the consecutive dichotomy method based on the choice by simple majority. 1. First, we calculated the percentage content of each value in the total sum of priorities. 2. Then we added up all figures together beginning with the bigger one till they exceeded 50%. The biggest group was called “main”. 3. For the rest values (factors) the same procedure described in point 2 was carried out twice. Thus, the auxiliary, additional and insignificant groups – eight values all in all – have been revealed.

According to a universal dialectic principle of complementarity, each value might manifest itself in two ways: positively and negatively. This division is justified by the thought that any attitude might be expressed either as a laudation of some virtue or as a disapproval of its antipode. Therefore one might get additional information on values considering negative or positive mention separately. Number “eight” has not appeared at random – it is in the range of operational memory average volume which embraces from 5 to 9 units (Dushkov, Korolev, Smirnov 2002: 444).

Systemic approach to Mari proverbs and sayings allowed to arrange eight basic traditional values in the following order of priorities: *family, ethics, labor, knowledge, food, speech, wealth and health*.

family (big extended, only then nuclear) (21%). The proverbs reflect the time when the Mari community completely belonged to a peasant civilization based on a patriarchal family structure. The family consisted of peasants united by blood kinship and by closely knit economic ties. There were big undivided families and small nuclear ones. Big extended units might include several married couples from one to three generations living together according to a patrilineal

pattern. As such a subsystem combined agrarian production with elements of hunting and gathering and living in a family and working hard for it were main requirements for the survival (*Парня шуко гынат, иктыжсымат руал шуымо ок шу* 'Fingers are many, but you will not cut any', *Атя – аьан йамдыштӧй ӧллӧш куштылгы (яжо)* 'It is easy to live on one's parents store', *Сурт вуй – нӧрӧен* 'A man is a head of the household'). The peasant culture taught family members to conform to rigid rules of unwritten law and ethics. *Respect for parents* was one of the most important (*Авалан кеч конавундашешет мунопулашкам шолто, садак парьымыште лият* 'Even if you make an omelette on your own palm still you will be in debt to your mother', *Ача-ава деч кугу от лий* 'You should not be bigger (more important) than your parents', *Ача-аватым жаплет гын, кужу ӱмыран (поро, пиалан) лият* 'If your respect your parents you will live long and happily'). Thus, another most significant prerequisite for living together was obeying the moral norms and rules of existing together. The proverbs set apart *ethics* as one of the vital values of a peasant life.

ethics (strict hierarchy of moral qualities with a strong accent on a respect to elder men) (20%). In the proverbs describing *ethics* the positive assessment is given to *bravery* and *kindness*: *Лӱддымӧ еӦ курыкым сӱмыралеш* 'People respect the brave', *Кашка ӱмбал вӱраӦ ок шӱӱ* 'A rope will not rot on the log', *Кӱцӱзӱллӧн висен ак пуэн* 'Beggars should be given alms without calculation', *Ик нуры цилӧ худам сӱнгӧ(ӱжтӧрӧ)* 'One good deed wins over all the evil'. *Greed, envy, malice* are evaluated negatively: *Пингӱдӱ морен пач кушмыкы тӱллӧ* 'A mean person returns the debt only when the hare's tail gets longer', *Енлан пойымыжо семын шагалын чучеш* 'The wealthier the rich man becomes, the more difficult it is to satisfy him', *Осал кыша от тошко гын, осальш от шу* 'Who doesn't follow the path of evil, will not reach it', *Кынары паян, тӱн ӱрӱ куқыр, шык* 'He is as greedy as he is rich'.

labor (manual agrarian) (14.4%). A positive evaluation is given to the benefit of labor, negative to its hard character or man's laziness (*Пашам ыштен, йӧрдымашыш от шу* 'Working you will not become good for nothing', *Паша дене поет, ойгырен йомат* 'One gets rich from work, dies from sorrow', *Пашам чот ыштыше ӱй ден мӱйым кочкеш* 'If you work hard your festive table will be splendid (rich)', *Пашам чот ыштет гын, пайрем годым ӱстембал тич сиет лиеш* 'Who works hard eats butter and honey', *Кӱ намалеш, тӱдӱлӱн шуқыракым артен пуат* 'He who carries is loaded more', *Вӱр вилӧш пӧшӧм ӱштӧт, ӱлӱмӧшӱн лачокиш ӧкиӱм пӧлт* 'Who works till blood sweat appears, knows true value of life').

knowledge (of nature, climatic conditions, on keeping the agricultural cycle etc.) useful to keep an everyday life of an extended family (13%). It is interesting to note that *knowledge* and *skills* are associated with "natural" intelligence and work and not always with bookish education. They have a great importance for the nation (*Паша деч носна уш пенгӱдын ок шич* 'Without work you will not be clever', *Паша деч амалже шерге* 'Skills are more precious than work', *Висӱде ум нӱч, нӱлӱде ум нопы* 'Do not cut without measure, do not talk without knowledge (knowing facts)', *Кайык пунжо дене мотор, а айдеме – ушыж дене* 'A bird is beautiful by its feathers, a man – by his mind', *Шуко ылыше огыл, шуко тунемше шуко шинча* 'He who learns much knows much, but not he who has lived much (long)', *Ушдымо вуй тулдымо понар гай* 'The head without brains is like a lamp without light', *Яжо пӧшӧ кок курьымым ӧллӧ* 'Good work lives for two centuries').

food (12.3%). *Киндет лиеш гын, вольыкет лиеш* 'If there is bread, there is cattle', *Ўй ден жаритлен шындымеке, шўкшў йыдалымат кочкат* 'You will eat an old bast shoe if it is fried with/in butter', *Ўй дене пучымьши ок локтылалт* 'You will not spoil porridge with butter', *Чевеp муно ден ош мунын тамже икак* 'Either a dyed (an Easter decorated) egg or not, the taste is the same', *Шыл лиеш ыле гын, кравецьым ыштышаиш ыле, ложаиш уке* 'If we had meat we would bake meat pies, but there is no flour', *Пўрыжэ сай да коркаже изи* 'The beer is good but the cup (ladle) is small', *Шыл укеште шодат томсык* 'If there is no meat even lungs are a treat'.

communication, speech (9%); In the factor "speech" the negative assessment is given to *waffle, gossip, bad language, boasting, lies* and *hypocrisy*: *Кандран кужужо сай, мутын кечэкио* 'A good rope is long, a good word is short', *Мэьгалтише печке – яра* 'An empty barrel makes much noise', *Осал йылме пики гае* 'The evil tongue is like an arrow', *Йылмет яклака – чонет какляка* 'The tongue is smooth, the soul is loathsome (repulsive, cruel)', *Шоя мут – кум кечаиш, чын мут – курымаиш* 'A false word lasts for three days, a true word is for centuries (eternity)'.

wealth (Mari lived in an extreme poverty) (7.2%). *Шуко окса дене йымыланже пызыргет* 'Big money might crash', *Кьйр гань нужда, нимажат уке* 'As poor as bast (he has nothing)', *Кўсен кўргыш окса йоген ок пура* 'Money itself will not come to the pocket', *Оксан лийнет гын, эр кынет* 'If you want to be with money, get up early', *Окса мурен ок тол* 'Money will not come with a song', *Паян кым кечайиш, незер курымаиш* 'One can be rich for three days and poor for the rest of the life (Wealth is for three days, poverty is for the rest of the life)', *Поян ден уишаиш йўсэ* 'It is difficult to unite with the rich', *Поянын намьсыжын пундаишьже уке* 'The rich man's greed is bottomless', *Шыжым колят поян лиеш* 'In autumn even a mouse is rich', *Кунар поян, тунар сут* 'He is as greedy as he is rich'.

health (high death rate among babies) (2.9). It is surprising that the Mari neglect their health. *Каришьдым вуеш савыцьым ак пидеп* 'One will not put on a kerchief if there is no headache', *Каришьиш вэрйиш кид миэ* 'An aching spot draws a hand', *Короминэжэ веле кодын* 'He became so thin that only body and skin are left', *Корольиш пиитэйиш яралэ* 'He is fit only for a coffin', *Ўитымыжсан эдемлэйн камака вьлнэйт ўиты* 'A sick person in/with fever is cold even on the stove', *Цер аран толеиш, пьрцьыкьин кеэ* 'Illness comes in heaps, goes away in grains', *Цилэ каришьишьым момоца тёрлэ* 'All diseases are cured in sauna (Sauna cures all diseases)'.

The results of statistical analysis of the introduced factors for the easiness and simplicity of perception are depicted in the form of a differential factor diagram shown in Fig. 1

Analysing it, we draw a conclusion that the principal values for the Mari are: *family, ethics, labor*. Of secondary importance, least vital are: *wealth* and *health*. *Family, ethics, knowledge and food* are mainly positively assessed. More negatively than positively are evaluated *speech and wealth*. Thus diagram analysis shows that in Mari proverbs and sayings we can find a high evaluation of the *family, ethics* and *work* and absence of striving for *wealth* and *money*, a stoic attitude towards *health*. Difficult life conditions of the Mari determined *labor* as the main value and more negative in comparison with it – evaluation of *speech*. It is interesting to note that the value of *food* occupies the low, fifth place which shows a spiritual disposition of the ethnos.

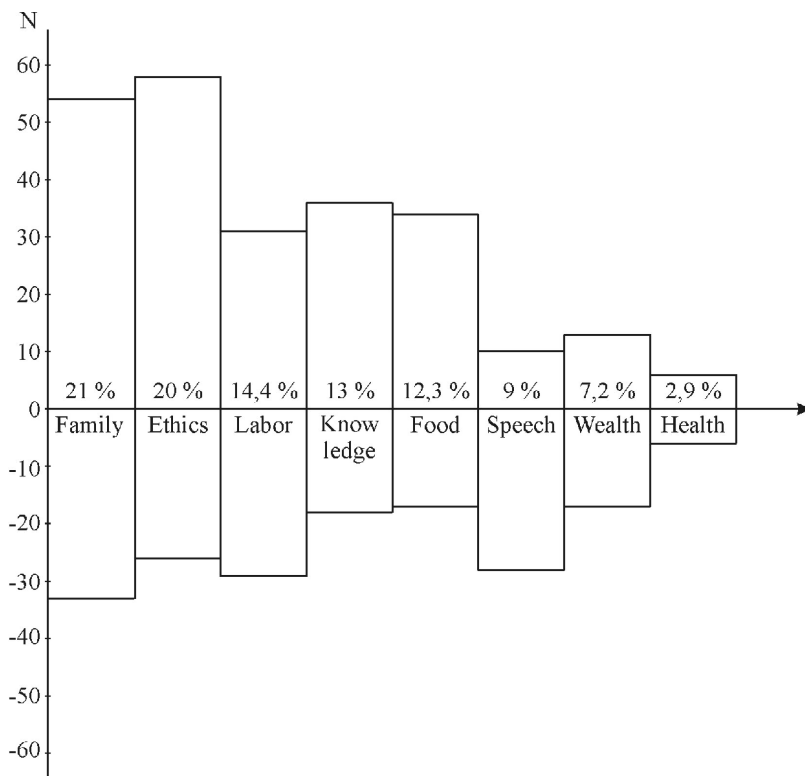


Fig.1. Differential factor diagram of Mari ethnic values

Any system besides its elements-factors is characterized by the type and amount of ties among them. Proverbs and sayings represent a reliable data for establishing these ties as nearly in all of them there is a judgment on causal, equivalent or complementary relations. Relying on this assumption we may show the links within the system graphically, depicting them as lines and arrows. It would appear reasonable that main systemic elements (factors) should be arranged in the center of a diagram and are shown by “bold” lines connected with arrows (Fig. 2). Arrow directions show mainly cause and effect relationship; ties depicted by two opposite arrows show interaction of relationship of equivalence or interdependence.

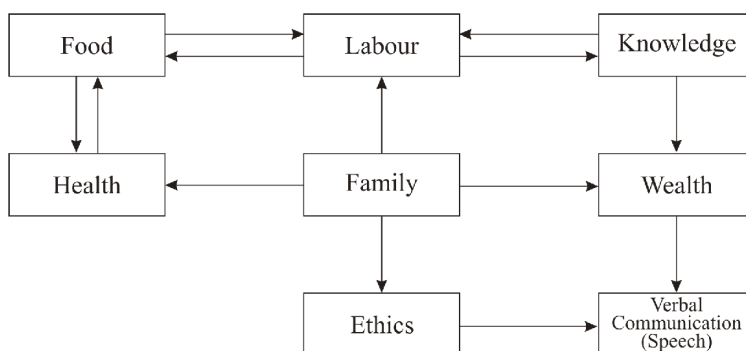


Fig.2. Mari ethnic system of values represented in proverbs and sayings

At first sight this list of values seems to be trivial but we can see a wise economy of resources for the clan survival under severe climatic circumstances, limiting consumption and complicated interpersonal relationships within a big extended family (Smirnov 1991:94–119). The fundamental system of values esteemed by the Mari community and reflected in proverbs has been stable for a long time.

The analysis and interpretation of Mari authentic texts show that the subsystem of values is original and unique as it has few or no analogs in European culture (Encyclopedia 2004; Encyclopedia 2005).

It might be well to point out that the reconstructed system of values contradicts to the existing direction of contemporary social processes of globalization, transition to a market economy and postindustrial society, connected with a craving for wealth and individualism.

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