

## The Origin of Mordvin M *šaba*, E *žaba* 'child' and Cheremis *šubo*

In Mordvin, there is a word meaning 'child', mdM *šaba*, E *žaba*, that corresponds to the Cheremis form *šubo*. For this word no satisfactory etymology has so far been presented. In this article I will suggest a new explanation of its origin. While working on the article, I have had the opportunity to discuss different problems pertinent to the question with Sirkka Saarinen at the University of Turku and Ingvar Svanberg at the University of Uppsala and I would like to express my gratitude for their valuable help.

According to Potapkin-Umjarekov (1949) mdM *šaba* means 'child' and is synonymous to the word *id*. Also Juhász (1961. 163) has mdM *šaba* 'child'. From Erza Mordvin Koljadenkov-Cyganov (1949) have *žaba* 'child' and the same word is quoted also by Evsev'ev (1931. 31), who also has the word in a different phonetic form in one of his examples: *soń šabadonza lama* 'he has many children'.

The Cheremis form corresponding to this Mordvin word is *šubo*, but it exists almost exclusively as part of the compound *iγe-šubo* (Paasonen-Siro 1948). The compound consists of *iγe* 'the young of an animal' and *šubo* (cf. Galkin 1978. 43 who gives phonetic variants of the words). This compound is known in several different phonetic variants — more or less transparent — in the collections of the Cheremis dictionary at the University of Turku. The word is known all over the Cheremis area and among the examples of the dictionary the following could be quoted: *iksūbo* (Birsk), *i:γǎ -sü'γǎ* (Sernur), *iγǎ-š̄n̄:β̄n̄* (Jaransk) and *ikXšə* (Kozmodemjansk; all the forms notations by Wichmann).

For Mordvin M *šaba*, E *žaba* and Cher. *šubo* Paasonen (1897. 51) suggests Mishar Tatar origin. He reports having heard a Mishar Tatar man using a word *žaba*, which would mean 'dwarf'. Such a word would, he says, show a striking similarity with Arabic "šābb jüngling, junger mann" and obviously his idea is that we have to do with an Arabic word transferred

to the Volgaic languages by the Mishar Tatars. Not even Paasonen himself seems, however, to be convinced by the etymology, although he emphasizes that the Mordvin word gives the impression of being foreign due to the non-initial *-b-*, a sound that, according to him, does not exist in indigenous Mordvin words (cf. also Paasonen 1893. 15f.). I have not been able to find any such Mishar Tatar word; it is not attested in Budagov (1869), nor is there any word \**žaba* meaning 'dwarf' in Radloff's dictionary. Even if such a word were to exist, the semantic development 'dwarf' → 'child' would seem dubious. Being a child is, after all, a more normal state than that of being a dwarf. Cygankin–Mosin (1977. 20), however, seem to accept the etymology suggested by Paasonen and report mdM *šaba*, E *žaba* as being of Turkic origin.

Genetz (1897. 39) compares Mordvin *šaba*, *žaba* with Cheremis "*šaba* heikko" (cf. *šava* 'weak' in MRS) and combines them with Finnish *hievvukka* 'weak, thin' and Finnish *sievonen* 'nice, clean'. Such a comparison should, however, be discarded since it would not represent any regular sound development (cf. Finnish *liemi* 'broth, soup'/md. *lem*/cher. *lem*; FUV).

Instead of the Mishar Tatar origin of mdM *šaba*, E *žaba* and Cher. *šuβo* suggested by Paasonen (1897. 51) and accepted by Cygankin–Mosin (1977. 20), a word in Sanskrit seems better suited as origin. Skr. *šāva-*, also attested in a diminutive form *šāvaka-*, means 'the young of any animal' (Monier-Williams). Both the phonetic shape of the word and its meaning suggest a comparison with mdE *žaba*, M *šaba* and Cher. *šuβo*.

It is well-known that there are Indo-Iranian loanwords in the Volgaic languages, both such as are usually assumed to have entered Proto-Finno-Ugric, e.g. mdE *šado*, M *šadä*/Cher. *šūdō* '100', and such as have come into use by later contacts, e.g. mdE *kšni*, *kšne*/Cher. *kartni*, *kürtni* 'iron'. The latter word, to which there are corresponding forms also in Permian languages and in Vogul, is regarded by Korenchy (1972. 58f.) and Joki (1973. 273) as being an example of later separate contacts between Iranian and Volgaic peoples.

To support the idea of mdM *šaba*, E *žaba* and Cher. *šuβo* 'child' as an Indo-Iranian loanword, words corresponding to Skr. *šāva-* should be searched for. This, however, is a rather complicated matter. According to Walde–Pokorny (1959) Skr. *šāva-* 'das Junge eines Tieres' derives from an Indo-European stem \**k'eu-* 'schwellen, Schwellung, Wölbung; Höhlung, hohl'. They do not supply any direct etymologically corresponding form from any other Indo-European language, although the stem is present in several other words, all of which Walde–Pokorny (1959) group under the basic meaning 'Wölbung nach aussen oder innen'. According to Peterson (1916. 139), however, Skr. *šāva-* 'the young of any animal' could be combined with a

Proto-Slavic \**suka*, attested in Russian *suka* 'bitch'. Although Skr. *śāva-* 'the young of any animal' apparently is not too well supported by other Indo-European words, it is worth being examined as the possible origin of mdE *žaba*, M *šaba* and Cher. *šužo* 'child'.

As to the semantic correspondence there are hardly any objections to raise against the alleged Indo-Iranian origin of these words in the Volgaic languages. A fluctuation between the meanings 'child' and 'the young of an animal' has parallels in other languages, e.g. in Swedish where *unge* has both these meanings.

When it comes to the phonetic development of the Indo-Iranian word in the Volgaic languages, there are problems. The non-initial stop in the Mordvin forms seems dubious, even if it might be possible to assume a variation of *b* and *v*. Certainly, one would have expected a *v*, cf. mdE *rav*, *ravo* 'the river Volga' < Indo-Iranian, e.g. Avesta *ravan-* 'river' (Joki 1973. 307). Furthermore, the representation of an Indo-Iranian \**ś-* by Mordvin *š-* is not usual, cf. instead Finnish *suka* 'Borste; Bürste, Striegel, Kamm'/Mordvin *šuva* 'Granne, Achel, Spreu' < Indo-Iranian, cf. Skr. *śūka* 'Granne des Getreides, Stachel eines Insekts' (Joki 1973. 315, cf. also Collinder 1960. 55). The initial voiced sonant of mdE *žaba*, however, is explained as a spontaneous variation between voiced and voiceless consonants, illustrated by Paasonen (1893. 11) by examples as mdE *šul'ńams*, *žol'ńams* 'rieseln'.

In addition to this, it seems suspicious that Walde-Pokorny (1959) do not give any words from other Indo-Iranian languages that would correspond to Skr. *śāva-*. Neither does Mayrhofer (1976) in his etymological Sanskrit dictionary, although he gives examples from Middle Indic and Modern Indic languages. One's doubts are increased by the theory of Kuiper (1948. 67, 136) that Skr. *śāva-* is a loanword from Munda languages; Kuiper compares it with Santali *debe* 'dwarfish, small'. If this theory is correct, then Skr. *śāva-* would be an Indian word in the sense that it has originated on the Indian subcontinent and would not have any old Iranian cognates.

Skr. *śāva-* 'the young of any animal', which, with regard to its meaning, seems to fit very well as the origin of mdE *žaba*, M *šaba* and Cher. *šužo* 'child', consequently causes two problems. The first is the consonantism of the Mordvin words, which does not seem to be the regular representation in an Indo-Iranian loanword. The second problem is that it is not at all clear how this word would have passed over from languages in India to the Volgaic languages.

To regard mdM *šaba*, E *žaba* 'child' and Cher. *šužo* as an Indo-Iranian loanword causes problems. These problems can, however, be avoided if the word is regarded as a loan from the language of the Gypsies. In the different sources on Romany, there are words that seem to fit as the origin of the word

in the Volgaic languages, e.g. *čhavó* 'Knabe, Sohn' (Miklosisch 1878. 270), *tšao* 'mustalaispoika' (Valtonen 1972), *šavo*, *šav* 'male child, boy, lad, son (of Gipsy race)' (Gjerdman-Ljungberg 1963. 353), *tschawo*, *tschavo*, *tschabo*, *tshabo*, *chabo*, *zschabe*, *chabby* 'Knabe, Sohn, Kind' (Wolf 1960). Johansson (1977) has the form *tja'vo* 'boy; son, child' and also quotes the forms *tchavó*, *tchao* and *tcho* from Paspati and *čau* from Thesleff.

This Gypsy word is regarded as the etymological counterpart of Skr. *śāva-* 'the young of any animal' by, e.g., Valtonen (1972). Turner (1966. 275), who gives examples from several Middle Indic and Modern Indic languages, e.g. Pali *chāpa-* 'young of an animal', Prakrit *chāva-*; Kashmiri *čhav* 'young of animal, young shoot of plant', Assamese *sāw*, *sāwā* 'young of animal or bird' and Welsh Romany *čavō* 'boy', regards it, however, as far from certain that Skr. *śāva-* belongs to this group of words; "very doubtful" is his opinion about the comparison. For this investigation the etymological relation between the Sanskrit and the Romany word is in fact of no importance. Mordvin M *šaba*, E *žaba* and Cheremis *šužo* can be a loanword from the language of the Gypsies, regardless of the relation between Romany *čhavó* 'boy' and skr. *śāva-* 'young of any animal'.

As far as I know, nobody has treated of the question of possible linguistic contacts between Gypsies and Volgaic peoples. Yet there is hardly any reason not to. The form *čhavó* quoted above from Miklosisch (1878) originates from Ssumy in the then existing province of Charkov. Ariste (1972) has material from Gypsies in the Baltic states, Finck (1907) describes the language of Armenian Gypsies and Sanarov (1970) treats of Siberian Gypsies. Lector Margarita Česnokova (personal communication), who is herself a Mokša Mordvin, has also confirmed the existence of Gypsies in the Mokša Mordvin area.

With regard to the phonetic shape of the words, there seems to be no difficulty in regarding the Volgaic words as loanwords from the Gypsy language. The voiced stop in mdE *žaba*, M *šaba* caused problems when the word was compared to Skr. *śava-*. It is true that most of the Romany forms of the word *tschawo* that I have found in fact have a *-v-*, but here we have to pay attention also to a bilabial pronunciation, cf. the spellings *tschawo* and *tschavo* in Wolf (1960). Furthermore, Wolf (1960) gives several examples where the Romany word has a *-b-*. It could also be mentioned that although I have found just forms with *-v-* in dictionaries of the Gypsy dialects of Sweden, this word when taken over into Swedish has acquired the form *tjabo*.

The borrowing of a word meaning 'child' from one language to another is not unusual. Lappish *bar'dne* 'child' is a Scandinavian loanword. From Romany Swedish has borrowed both *tjabo* denoting boy and *tjej* 'girl'. The

latter word originally had the value of a vernacular or even slang word but is nowadays becoming quite a normal word for 'girl'. It is also interesting to compare the Volgaic words to Swedish *pojke* 'boy' which has been borrowed from Finnish *poika* 'boy'. According to Molde (1984: 92) this could at first have been a kind of everyday or even slang word, but later on it has become the normal word for 'boy' in Swedish. The semantic development can have been similar in the case of Romany *tschawo* in the Mordvin dialects.

As to the closer circumstances of the alleged borrowing very little can be said with certainty without more detailed knowledge about the history of the Gypsies in the Volga region. Although Md *šaba*, *žaba* and Cher. *šušo* generally have been treated of together when their etymology has been discussed, they should rather be considered two separate borrowings. Not only does this agree better with current theories about the earlier assumed "Proto-Volgaic" language (cf. e.g. Hajdú 1981: 47), but it also pays due respect to the differences between Mordvin, where *šaba*, *žaba* obviously are the common word for 'child', and Cheremis, where *šušo* mainly is part of a more or less opaque compound, cf. *iye-šušo* (Paasonen-Siro 1948) and *ik<sup>x</sup>šə* (Kozmodemjansk).

Mordvin M *šaba* 'child', E *žaba* 'id'. and Cheremis *šušo* have been explained by Paasonen (1897) on rather uncertain grounds as a Mishar Tatar word. The same opinion is adopted also by Cygankin-Mosin (1977) in their Mordvin etymological dictionary. In this article I firstly compare it with Sanskrit *śāva-* 'the young of any animal' to see whether it could be an Indo-Iranian loanword. Since the Indo-European basis of this word seems dubious and since there are phonetic difficulties in regarding the Mordvin forms as an old Indo-Iranian loanword, the Volgaic word is secondly instead explained as a loanword from Romany, where forms like *tschawo*, *tschavo* and *tschabo* denote 'boy'.

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