

Riho GRÜNTAL (Helsinki)

Erzya chastushka – vanishing or changing oral tradition?

Introduction

Concise, apposite and quick-witted texts and tunes are the bread of modern popular music and hits that display numerous variants of short and pithy performances. The traditional folklore genres and oral tradition of Finno-Ugric peoples have not had such characteristics. On the contrary, reports on traditional oral poetry have documented epic genres and long, narrative forms of folklore. The changes that took place during the 20th century in the language and culture of Finno-Ugric communities brought a considerable change in oral tradition as well. Chastushkas, an originally Russian genre, brief and mainly humoristic songs entered the folklore of many Finno-Ugric peoples. Generally speaking, they fulfill all the typical criteria of a folklore genre. They are merely oral songs that are never distributed in a printed form, nor are they in mass media and, as a rule, they are typically only impromptu.

The current paper presents a short overview and selection of Erzya chastushkas that were recorded in Erzya villages during expeditions that were made in the 1990's. Chastushkas are known from the 20th century folklore tradition of other Finno-Ugric peoples living in the European part of Russia as well and the first examples were published before the Second World War. Language is the most relevant characteristic that distinguishes Erzya chastushkas from Russian, Karelian, Veps, Mari, Udmurt and Komi chastushkas or those of any other people. Like numerous other ethnic minorities in Russia these Finno-Ugric peoples have learned this aphoristic and humoristic genre from the Russians. Given the parallel tradition in many cultures, the adaption to local folklore tradition takes place by means of language.

Although the title *Erzya chastushka – vanishing or changing oral tradition?* posits a question the paper is not meant to answer it. Instead of it our goal is to point out that despite considerable changes that took place in Erzya cultural traditions and Erzya-speaking communities during the 20th century chastushkas are an example of a living tradition that appeared in Erzya culture at a period in which traditional forms of oral tradition were lost. This claim is evidenced in the data and the sample that is far from an exhaustive collection. In fact, given the dynamic and productive character of this genre it would not make much sense to handle the issue as an object within a quantitative frame.

The publishing of the following data thus serves three aims. Firstly, it introduces a modern form of oral tradition that historically, in a way, fills the gap of several lost genres. Secondly, it presents chastushkas as a genre that was originally adopted from Russian culture but was transferred to the Erzya as it did among other groups. Thirdly, it seeks to promote the interest of folklorists towards living tradition of Finno-Ugric peoples.

The historical background of chastushkas as an oral genre

Unlike traditional folklore forms of agrarian and nomadic communities, the chastushka is an undeniable newcomer in the list of various forms of oral tradition. It developed during the second half of the 18th century in Russia and the name *chastushka* refers to the transient character of the performance (Russian *частушка* [cf. *частый* ‘often’ < **čestъ*] originally ‘[something that is] frequently repeated’ [Vasmer & Trubachev 1964–1973: 4: 318]). In the beginning love was the prevailing theme that gradually began to extend to other topics. The genre is not as typically improvised as some others, e.g. laments. Nor is it an undistinguishable part of any social rite or social ceremonies such as weddings that do not determine how, when or where chastushkas are performed. Later, chastushkas have gained popularity as an easily transformable genre that used to be accompanied with the accordion or balalaika and began to spread. During the expeditions from which the data below originates some of the informants even noted that earlier there had not been any chastushkas.

The oldest reports of Mordvin chastushkas date back to as early as the 1890’s and are documented in the manuscripts of M. Ye. Yevsev’yev that include written chastushka texts (Samoshkin 1976: 6). The folklore collections of Heikki Paasonen originating from the same era include songs that are characterized as dance melodies (*Mordwinische Volksdichtung* 4 [1948]: 424–429), but they do not correspond structurally nor thematically to chastushkas. Conceivably, the chastushkas most probably were not widespread in Mordvin communities in the end of 19th century (Samoshkin 1976: 41–45).

There are big differences between the chastushkas and traditional forms of Erzya oral folklore. Epic songs, bride songs, recruit songs and keens (wailing lament for the dead) were characteristic of old oral poetry and they had a very close liaison to social ceremonies and rites. The ceremonies themselves could last for several hours or even days and the forms of folklore corresponded to their social function also in time and duration (*Mordwinische Volksdichtung*, PMNMI, Saarinen 1990: 36–119, UPTMN) The epic songs were not strictly bound with time and space which is a feature mutually shared with chastushkas in some respect. However, it is evident that there is no natural way to combine any traditional Mordvin folklore genre with chastushkas in terms of continuity of folklore. Although the same performers and elder people who know chastushkas sometimes know some fragments of older genres there is hardly any inter-genre or cross-genre influence to be marked in Erzya chastushkas. The reason is evident, because old oral poetry has its roots in the past and extensive agrarian societies whereas chastushkas originate from Russian folklore and were implanted in the changing community. Yet, there is some evidence that old forms of Mordvinic oral tradition and folklore genres were adapted to a new social and political system during the intensive construction of a social society as organized local choirs began to perform them (MNP).

Interestingly, the chastushkas show up in the folklore of Erzya and other minority communities at the same time when more traditional forms were gradually aban-

done. The implementation of Soviet culture and model of a Soviet society by force contributed to a relatively rapid loss of oral tradition especially from the 1920's and 1930's on as collective meetings such as village feasts were prohibited. After a famine that hit the Volga area in the beginning of 1920's and a relatively calm period in the mid 1920's troubles resumed with a forced collectivization of agriculture (Lallukka 1990: 64–69). Therefore, the appearance of chastushkas as an entirely new and admissible form that belonged to another cultural context obviously took over the role of older forms as the contents of musical performances. This, too, shows the ambiguity of chastushkas as a part of oral tradition. Although they are not ritual songs and foster improvisation, they have a clear social function. This hypothesis would deserve a more extensive discussion than will be done here.

Although intensive field work is currently carried out on various Finno-Ugric traditions, there are no up-to-date studies on the cultural and social role of the chastushkas. As a rule, the existing works such as UPTMN, MECh and SM that were published in Russia (see references below) are compilations of field data in a literary form.

Unfortunately, no Russian chastushkas and comparative data was recorded from the same informants. By the time the songs were transliterated and the introduction was written I realized that it would have made sense to record Russian chastushkas presented by the same informants that practically all were bilingual to at least some extent as all Erzyas currently are. However, the informants emphasized that Erzya chastushkas are unique and never translations from Russian chastushkas and, thus, basically more independent than one would assume of a bicultural tradition.

This partly contradicts the earlier observation of Samoshkin who assumes that a part of the Mordvin chastushkas is translated from Russian. There is no concrete documentation on the diffusion of Russian chastushkas in Mordvin areas but Samoshkin (1965: 402; 1976: 54), nevertheless, assumes that the adoption of Russian chastushkas in Mordvin-speaking communities took place by means of areal diffusion in the Oblasts of Penza, Gorkiy (Nizhniy Novgorod), Kuibyshev (Samara) and Voronezh. There are certain thematic types that are represented both in Mordvin and Russian chastushkas. However, Samoshkin (1965: 405) concludes that the number of translated chastushkas is not high, because the transferring of this genre is complicated.

Thematic focus and variation

The key characteristics of the chastushkas as a folklore genre do not focus on repeating a particular theme that would attach to social traditions and habits. The brevity and aphoristic clauses rather make the impression that the thematics is not as important as the chastushkas as the mediator of a social performance. As structurally short and momentaneous presentations they seem to fulfill in a way the same task as modern short folklore genres as anecdotes and jokes or traditions of children's communities that are a flexible and quite pertinent piece of European and American urban tradition (Lehtipuro 1980: 9).

The reproduction rules of chastushkas are closely connected to the present-day world but contextual factors do not influence their performance very strictly. The genre itself is exclusively humorous and, hence, funerals and serious events are not the social environment where chastushkas are performed. Any occasion may stimulate people to start singing. An opposing attitude to seriousness and grave everyday matters is especially provocative.

Despite the thematic divergence, some motives are repeated more frequently than others. In the chastushka sample below, for instance, the introduction *ve'ga l'ivt'i eroplan* 'above, there is an aeroplane flying', and its variants are repeated several times (cf. chastushkas [17, 18, 27, 43, 44]). A similar thematic reference is found in Tver Karelian chastushkas as well: *timoškina šuuri külä, ieroplanat lennelläh* 'Timoshkina is a big village, aeroplanes are flying' (Kukk 1989: 50). In this type of frequently reproduced motives one can assume that subtexts and Russian chastushkas are involved in the frequency and reproduction of the same motive. On the other hand, however, variation and a versatile multiplication of versions is a characteristic feature of oral tradition and cannot be separated from the old Erzya Mordvin epic song tradition either. There are also motives that are bound more tightly to the local language by means of rhymes, such as in chastushkas (19) and (33) (see below) or place names as *Kosogor* in chastushka (35) and *Kuchan'* (*Kučań*) in chastushka (39).

In general, chastushkas do not reveal much of old and aged historical and political changes in Erzya or Russian society. Instead of reflecting time they are a mirror of the performing situation and its world. This fits the assumption that reproduction is mostly limited to relatively short periods of time (Honko 1980: 24). However, those politicians and political issues that were pertinent in the given context and close to the time when the chastushkas were performed present a very sharp and satiric attitude. In chastushkas (50) and (57), for instance, Gorbachev and Yeltsin are made responsible for a miserable state of the subject of the chastushkas. Likewise, in chastushkas (18) and (51) perestroika is presented as a parallel to poverty and starving, the result of a political and social reform that Gorbachev had started only a few years earlier.

Environment and context do not play a very significant role in performing chastushkas although one would exaggerate by claiming that they have no role at all. The text outlines the contemporary world of the performer and the songs are tightly connected with social phenomena, of which love and social relationships are frequently repeated. Therefore, the context of the performance and humorous atmosphere without exited emotions is often more decisive for the chastushkas as the texts themselves. As other folkloristic texts chastushkas confirm that texts appear as a part of communication and they are based on direct contact between two or more people, in which the narrator himself has only a minor role. Of the different contexts listed by Hoppál (1980: 115–119) social is the most important, whereas e.g. linguistic context has hardly any significance. The narrator rejects the reference of the chastushka to the real world background and the theme of the chastushka culminates in one way or another in a comic thematic conflict that is often emphasized with rhymes. Language as such and as a mean of communication and social environment is more important than the linguistic environment.

Language and metrics

Local language, dialects and variants are typically present in chastushkas that is characteristic of oral poetry and folklore. Although different singers would repeat the same motives as mentioned above, language and local forms and variants increase variation as *kovont'e – lovont'e* ‘to the moon – to the snow’ in chastushka number (19), but *konst'eñ – loñst'eñ* id. in chastushka (33) and the equivalence in Moksha *kovt'i – lovt'i* (see endnote 17) demonstrate. The point in this kind of examples, nevertheless, is not the variation between local dialects. Rather, it illustrates how language and especially rhyme and the number of syllables are used to emphasize the thematic contrasts.

Although chastushkas are newcomers in Erzya folklore tradition they are still carried by the same oral basis as the old genres were based on. In western world serial films and comics they respond to the same human needs as fairy tales did in earlier times. In this sense, the chastushkas obviously profit from their impulsive and momentaneous structure and thematic aptness to react on every-day matters. They are current and can therefore spread pretty fast from mouth to mouth like rumors and gossip do, although the latter have a strong tendency to die out when it loses its pertinence not to forget the importance of the audience (cf. Virtanen 1980: 141–145). With respect to this kind of oral tradition chastushkas, however, have another structural feature that supports their maintenance, namely rhythm and melody. Melody does not seem to bear a very important role, because individual chastushkas frequently do not have their own melodies, whereas rhythm and metrics are more decisive for the structure of the chastushka and the selection of words.

Samoshkin (1976: 57) notes that in certain Mordvin-Russian parallel chastushkas Russian phrases and entire verses are included in the Mordvin version and the rhythm between the Mordvin and Russian version is identical.

From a metrical viewpoint, Erzya chastushkas consistently display the trochee, a two-syllable metric foot. The most typical verse structure of the sample below is A–B–A–B, in which the syllable number of the first and third line, respectively the second and fourth line correspond to one another. The number of syllables in this type of chastushkas is 8–7–8–7 and it occurs in 23 chastushkas of the presented data. The hyme pair is more frequently formed between the second and fourth line than the first and third, which, nevertheless, is also possible. An illustrative example is seen in chastushka 6 (example [1]) that has the same metrical structure in variants (chastushkas 12 and 30) presented by other informants and published collections as well (see endnote 3).

- | | | |
|-----|-----------------------------------|-----------------|
| (1) | <i>il'a jaka umar' sadga</i> | + o + o + o + o |
| | <i>il'a jaka rosava</i> | + o + o + o + |
| | <i>il'a manči l'ija t'ejt'er'</i> | + o + o + o + o |
| | <i>il'a t'ejhe dosada</i> | + o + o + o + |

‘Don’t walk through apple orchards,	not.IMP walk apple garden.PROL
don’t walk through the dew,	not.IMP walk dew.PROL
don’t entice another girl,	not.IMP entice other girl
don’t do any harm.’	not.IMP do.FREQ harm

Erzya is a morphologically complex language with a rich suffixal system. Grammatical elements are frequently used to constitute rhyme pair *chastushkas*. This is illustrated in the relationship between the prolativ form *rosava* ‘dew.PROL’ and *dosada* ‘harm’ in example (1), and example (2) that displays rhyme pairs between two definite forms *l’išmap’rás* ‘spring.DEF’ and *alužoš* ‘darling.DEF’ and by repeating the negative particle *aras*.

- (2) *t’e kodamo l’išmap’rás* + o + o + o +
čuvan, čuvan, ved’ aras + o + o + o +
t’e kodamo moň alužoš + o + o + o + o
učan, učan, son aras + o + o + o +

What is this spring like,	this what.sort.of spring.DEF
I dig and dig there is no water,	dig.1SG dig.1SG water not
what is my darling like,	this what.sort.of my darling.DEF
I wait and wait, (s)he won’t come.	wait.1SG wait.1SG (s)he not

The *chastushkas* display consistently the trochee, although the metric pattern is often elliptic as in the first line of example (2). Most frequently the variation from the prevailing syllable structure 8–7–8–7 is seen in the lack of one syllable. Thus the first or third line may consist of seven syllables instead of eight and the second respectively fourth line may have six syllables. These deviations increase the number of possible combinations considerably. As a rule, the latter part (AB) of the couplet of two lines may not have more syllables than the first one. In other words there is an implication that the lines two and four must not be longer than the preceding line. There are only few exceptions to this rule in the following data. *Chastushka* (49) is the only one in which the latter line of a couplet is longer than the first one. In addition to it *chastushka* (55) provides with another exception in which the second line is longer than the first one and in *chastushkas* (1, 3, and 50) the third line is shorter than the fourth one.

The collecting and organizing of the data

The data are organized according to informants who presented them, but they have not been sorted on the basis of any other criteria such as thematic or metric structure. The 58 *chastushkas* were collected directly from nine informants, of which eight were women. Many of the *chastushkas* have parallel versions repeating the same motives or lines in published sources. These variants are presented in numerated endnotes that follow the *chastushkas*. There is also mutual similarity between many of the col-

lected chastushkas. The thematic and structural correspondence between individual songs is mentioned by referring to parallel variants after those chastushkas that have in common with others. The texts are transcribed by applying as simple principles as possible. PhD Olga Yerina has been of dispensable help in checking and correcting the transliterations. She has also taken the trouble to search for the parallel versions of the recorded data in published sources.

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Erzya chastushkas

The documentation and recording of the chastushkas took place during field work expeditions in 1991 and 1995 in the Republic of Mordovia in Russia (Respublika Mordovskaya). One of the informants was born outside of the Republic (Orenburgskaya Oblast), whereas all the others were born and living in the Republic of Mordovia. The documentation of the is the following: chastushkas (1–3) Moksholey village, Chamzinskiy District; chastushkas (4–7) Kuzim village, Bol'shebereznykovskiy District; chastushkas (8–10, 40–57) Erzyan' Nayman (in Russian St. Naymany) village, Bol'shebereznykovskiy District; chastushkas (11–17) Kosogor village, Bol'shebereznykovskiy District; chastushkas (18–30) Vere Kuzla (in Russian Verkhniy Kuzla), Orenburgskaya Oblast; chastushkas (31–39) Kuchan' vel'e (in Russian Kuchenyayevo), Ardatovskiy District; chastushka (58) Atyashevo, Atyashevskiy District.

The texts were transliterated, analyzed and translated together with Dr. Ol'ga Yerina, a native Erzya speaker who also compared the data with published sources.

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|--|--|
| (1) <i>mon a mol'an pel'even'e
bañav orožijamo
vana siñ [jakit'] klubov
Jelciñ jalgañ kočkamo¹</i> | I do not go at midnight,
to the sauna in order to do magic.
Over there they [are visiting] the club
to elect comrade Yeltsin.
[Cf. 1, 5, 22, 40.] |
| (2) <i>dajt'e jalgat t'eke ver'ga
moronok kajasiñek
valske rana miñ st'atano
vid'imanok pr'adsiniñek²</i> | Friends, this way up here,
let us cast our song.
Early in the morning we shall rise
and finish our sowing. |
| (3) <i>užo jalgat, meže jovtan
teči koda mon šiziñ
surkinasto klubov
kišt'eme moramo siñ</i> | Wait friends, I'll tell you something.
Today how I got tired,
I came from Surkina to the club,
to dance and sing. |
| (4) <i>tšastuškat'neñ morasiñek
garmonija ikel'e
vajgel'eñek targasiñek
t'e publikant' ikel'e</i> | Let us sing these chastushkas
before the accordion,
let us present our voices
before this public. |
| (5) <i>mon a mol'an pel'even'e
bañav orožijama
lučše mol'an čokšna klubov
vansa pingiš kodama</i> | I do not go at midnight,
to the sauna in order to do magic.
I prefer to go to the club in the evening and
see what the era looks like.
[Cf. 1, 5, 22, 40.] |

- (6) *il'a jaka umar' sadga*
il'a jaka rosava
il'a manči l'ija t'ejt'eř
*il'a t'ejne dosada*³
- Don't walk through apple orchards,
don't walk before the dew,
don't entice another girl,
don't do any harm.
[Cf. 6, 12, 30.]
- (7) *val'ma langsa t'uža katka*
viš(i)ne l'evkske marta
mon mil'onam kadimim
viš(i)ne ejkakške marta
- At the window a brown cat
with a small kitten,
my darling left me
with a small child.
- (8) *karman tšastuškañ morama*
ešeñ eržañ kelnese
konstitucijado jovnit'
ervaj viška velnese
- I'm going to sing some chastushkas
in my very own Erzya language,
they are telling about the constitution
in every single little village.
[Cf. 8, 15.]⁴
- (9) *oj dojarka maja maña*
dajka vejce kišt'ana
miñek arast' aližinek
kid'ejak a vizdt'ana
- Oh, milker, my Manya,
let's dance together,
we don't have a darling,
we are not ashamed of anybody.
- (10) *morak mazika, morak*
balalaikaš tončet'
koda karmat uřvakstomo
*sajimak i moñ*⁵
- Sing beauty, sing,
the balalaika is yours.
When you are going to marry,
take me as well.
- (11) *val'maliñe kasi kil'ej*
reproduktor alinzi
radio veld'e mařavit'
Gorbačovoñ valonza
- (Right) under the window there is a birch
growing,
with a loudspeaker under it,
over the radio are heard
the words of Gorbachev.
[Cf. 11, 15.]
- (12) *il'a jaka sad piřeva*
il'a tapa rosadat
il'a manče lijañ čorat
il'a t'ejne dosadat
- Don't walk through the garden,
don't tramp on the seedlings,
don't entice someone else's boyfriend,
don't do any harm.
[Cf. 6, 12, 30.]
- (13) *dojarkanok pek robotit'*
lamo lovco pot'avtit'
valcke rana sin tujit'
čoksña pozda sin mad'it'
- Our milkers are working hard,
they are milking a lot of milk,
they leave early in the morning,
they lie down to sleep late in the evening.

- (14) *ojna škañe miñ jal'giñek
lamo nuža ñejiñek
a ñej vadřa eřamonok
ved'eks čud'i t'eveñek*
- During the war, friends,
we saw a lot of poverty.
But now our life is nice,
our things are flowing like water.
- (15) *val'malonok kasi kil'ej
kudřasonzo sornotñe
komsomolkaš mazi Nina
konstitucijañt' jovt'ni⁶*
- There is a birch growing out our window,
she's ruffling her curls,
the Komsomol worker beautiful Nina
is telling about the constitution.
[Cf. 8, 15.]
- (16) *moñ mil'kiñem Samařca di
jaki šolkoñ panarca
a moñ eřan vel'ese di
jupkam šisem kel'ese⁷*
- My darling is in Samara and
wears a silk shirt,
but I live in a village,
I have a skirt of seven spans.
- (17) *veřga l'ivt'i eroplan
l'očik rangi, kundatan
moñ alužiš armijaso
šorma kuči, a kadtan*
- Above there is an aeroplane flying,
the pilot yells, I'll catch you,
my darling is in the army,
sending letters, I won't leave you.
[Cf. 17, 18, 27, 43, 44.]
- (18) *veřga l'ivt'i jeroplan
udalonzo lačo
perestrojkañt' a t'ejsiñek
kulotano vačo⁸*
- Above there is an aeroplane flying,
with a wedge behind it,
we are not going to build perestroika,
we are going to starve to death.
[Cf. 17, 18, 27, 43, 44.]
- (19) *vasña kužan kovont'e
mej'l'e valgan lovont'e
žardo večkemam kadsamam
mol'an prokuratoront'e⁹*
- At first I shall climb to the moon,
afterwards I shall descend to the snow,
when my darling leaves me,
I shall go to the prosecutor.
[Cf. 19, 33.]
- (20) *vaj kodamo viřeš mazi
vaj kodamo čiš l'embe
vaj jalgiñem bal'agiñem
l'istt'a martom kišt'eme*
- Oh, how the forest is beautiful,
oh, how warm a day it is,
oh my darling my coltsfoot,
come and dance with me.
[Cf. 20, 41, 46.]
- (21) *alopeste veřepev
čavo bočka keveři
eřva nolgov odčorant'e
mazi t'ejt'er' eřavi¹⁰*
- From the lower end to the upper end,
an empty barrel is rolling,
a beautiful girl is needed for
every snot-nosed young man.
[Cf. 21, 42.]

- (22) *mon a mol'an t'eči pakšav
kukuruzoń kočkomo
a mol'an mon promks kudov
mazi moroń moramo* Today I'm not going to the field
to weed the corn,
but I'm going to the meeting house
to sing some beautiful songs.
[Cf. 1, 5, 22, 40.]
- (23) *val'ma langso ašt'i ćeća
čvet'i rozovojste
mon večkemam tuš lijańeń
a mon gořovojste* There is a flower on the window ledge,
blossoming like a rose,
my darling went to another,
but I [went] mourning.
- (24) *val'ma langso pivt'eń lovso
a stol langso čapamo
mon večkemam tuš kišt'eme
mon mel'gando čapamo¹¹* On the window ledge there's churning
milk,
but on the table sour,
my darling went to dance,
I went after him/her to clap (rhythm) for
him/her.
- (25) *avam ramaš bot'inkat
piže šnurka marto
mon a karman bašamo
ńe vačetńeń marto* My mother bought shoes
with green laces,
I am not going to talk
with those shit piles.
- (26) *šišem čorat pando pńasto
uskit' papant' pońadkasto
šišem t'ejt'ert' avard'it'
kov siń papant' keverd'it'* Seven men up on the hill
are hauling the penis out the lane,
seven girls are crying,
where are they rolling the penis to?
- (27) *veřga l'ivt'i jeroplan
a lapando nil'e
orgot t'este busurman
tatar kel'ej pil'e* Above there is an aeroplane flying,
but it has four wings,
get out of here, Busurman,
Tatar with wide ears!
[Cf. 17, 18, 27, 43, 44.]
- (28) *mil'kam žalka, mil'kam žalka
końazondo tumoń palka
ńeřezende kolija
il'azo večke l'ija¹²* I feel sorry for my darling, I feel sorry for
my darling,
who gets an oak stick for his forehead,
a block in his/her snout,
he/she mustn't love another one.
- (29) *pando pńaso samovar
pando alo čajńik
mińek Al'o mel'ńičaso
vatrakšoń načal'ńik¹³* A samovar on the top of a hill,
a tea boiler at the foot of the hill,
our Alyosha is at the mill
the boss of a frog.

- (30) *il'a jaka jalgaj mel'gan*
il'a tapa rozada
jalat'eke a večksamak
anšak t'ejat dosada
- Don't walk, my friend, after me,
don't tread on the seedlings,
you don't love me anyway,
you are just doing harm.
[Cf. 6, 12, 30.]
- (31) *kišt'emejak maštan*
moramojak maštan
kolhozoso robotam
*ovšejak a maštan*¹⁴
- I can dance,
I can sing,
working at the collective farm
is something I can't do at all.
- (32) *t'e kodamo l'išmapraš*
čuvan, čuvan, ved' aras'
t'e kodamo moñ alužoš
*učan, učan, son aras'*¹⁵
- What is this spring like,
I dig and dig there is no water,
what is my darling like,
I wait and wait, he/she is not there
[= doesn't come].
- (33) *veřej vačtan kojst'eñ*
alov vačtan lojst'eñ
moñ al'užom kadimem
*moll'am prokuroršt'eñ*¹⁶
- I look up to the moon,
I look down to the snow,
my darling has left me,
I'm going to the prosecutor.
[Cf. 19, 33.]
- (34) *čigan-avaš oružiješ*
ašo ponan kovtaso
moñ al'užom aras' t'ese
ažd'o t'enze jovtado
- The gypsy lady did magic,
in a white wool coat,
my darling is not here,
go and tell him/her.
- (35) *Kosogor vel'eš pokš*
no aras' kul'turazo
sodon baña udalga
*ašči molod'ožozo*¹⁷
- Kosogor village is big,
but it doesn't have any culture,
behind a sooty sauna,
is located its youth.
- (36) *mon večkil'in Kol'a l'em*
a nej Kol'a kadimem
Kol'an ešenze ikel'e
vejke ava šaldimem
- I used to love the name Kolya [Nikolay],
but now Kolya has left me,
in front of Kolya himself,
a lady mocked me.
- (37) *Kol'a šed'ak, Kol'a šed'ak*
Kol'a il'a nužal'do
čokšne alužot kevkst'iněk
*karmavtinžet' šed'amo*¹⁸
- Play, Kolya [Nikolay], play, Kolya,
Kolya don't be lazy,
in the evening we asked your darling,
she made you play.

- (38) *ul'evel' hot' ul'evel'
paro ćora ul'evel'
a išt'amo pianićas'
proval'ića tujivil'* If there were, if there were
a good guy,
but this kind of drunkard
should leave through the earth.
- (39) *kućaň vel'en t'ejt'ertńe
veše jakit šolkso
ombo vel'eň ćoratińe
mel'gast' panćit polkso* The girls of Kuchan' village,
they all wear silk,
the boys of the next village
are chasing after them in droves.
- (40) *vaj a mol'an pel'e veň
baňav orožijama
lućše mol'an ćoksńa klubov
pastanovkaň vanoma¹⁹* I do not go to the midnight,
sauna in order to do magic.
I prefer to go to the club in the evening
to see the play.
[Cf. 1, 5, 22, 40.]
- (41) *vaj kodama viřeš piže
vaj, kodama, čiś l'embe
moň jalgińem bal'agińem
ad'a martom kišt'ime* Oh, how the forest is green,
oh, how the sun is warm,
my friend, my coltsfoot,
come and dance with me.
[Cf. 20, 41, 46.]
- (42) *veře peste alo pev
tašto boćkat keřavit' [keveřit']
kažńe nolgov ćorańeň
vadřa t'ejt'eř eřavi²⁰* From the upper end [of the village] to the
lower end,
the old barrels are rolling,
for every snot-nosed guy,
a beautiful girl is needed.
[Cf. 21, 42.]
- (43) *veřga l'ivt'i ve galińe
ež t'enze jalga vešńi
kodamo naćal'nik putat[ano]
eś t'enze žepe pešt'i* Above there is a goose flying,
looking for a mate,
what sort of a boss we shall (ever) put,
he will fill his own pocket.
[Cf. 17, 18, 27, 43, 44.]
- (44) *veřga l'ivt'i jeroplan
kunškasonzo pružina
kona većki robotama
mad'i apak uźina²¹* Above there is an aeroplane flying,
with a spring in the middle of it,
he/she who likes to work,
goes to sleep without having a dinner.
[Cf. 17, 18, 27, 43, 44.]

- (45) *karman jalgiñe kišt'ime
kavto pil'gim vačkod'iñ
ežiñ dumajak mon koda
sirečit'i pačkod'iñ*
- I'm going to dance, my friend,
I stamped my two feet,
I didn't think, how
I arrived to old age.
- (46) *viř cířese kasi čéčka
ked'em venst'sa mon šežsa
oh jalgiñe, bal'agiñem
sirečiñt' ñej kov t'ejšan*
- There is a flower growing on the edge of
the forest,
I stretch my hand and pick it,
oh my darling my coltfoot,
where am I going to put the old age, now?
[Cf. 20, 41, 46.]
- (47) *miñ mird'em marto ašt'inik
čoksñeš ulñeš kel'me
a ñej nargi langozim
paražiteñ šel'me*
- We were sitting together my husband and I,
the evening was cold,
but now that eye of a parasite
he's teasing me.²²
- (48) *přasam paća señala
čiñ karšo a olavća
mon aližim šeste vadřa
kij langsak a polavtsa*
- The scarf on my head is bluish,
it doesn't turn pale in the sun,
my darling is the most beautiful,
I won't change him/her for anyone.
- (49) *Moskovoñ zooparkt'ñese
kl'etkaso ašt'it pavat'ñe
miñek vel'eseñek
lama pianiča avat'ñe*
- In the zoos of Moscow
the peacocks are in the coop,
in our village,
there are many drunkard ladies.
- (50) *miñek araš muškinik
araš miñek vata
Gorbačov i Jeltsin
narodot' kadiz štapa*
- We don't have tow,
we don't have cotton,
Gorbachev and Yeltsin,
left the people naked.
[Cf. 50, 57.]
- (51) *perestrojkaš koda karmaj
dumiñ, vadřa eřamo
a ñej užert, pilat sajan
tujan viřen keřama*
- When perestroika began,
I thought life would be nice,
but now I take my axe and saw,
I am going to cut down the forest.
- (52) *ona tosa viřeñt' jona
traktort moda vel'avtit'
uborkasto mašinaso
šuroñt' kudov ujevt'it'*
- Over there towards the forest,
the tractors are turning the soil,
at harvest time they'll use trucks,
to sneak the grain home.
[Cf. 52, 56.]

- (53) *viř čirise kasi tumo
přazo mastorov komaš
pando přaso pužeň čěčkaks
išt'a jutaš od poraš* Near the forest an oak is growing,
with its top bent to the ground,
like a faded flower on a hill top,
their youth passed on.
- (54) *mol'an mol'an lejeň krajga
kajan čěčka ved'et'eň
kostojak mezd' a mujan
lakića šed'ejent'eň* I walk and walk along the riverside,
I throw a flower in the water,
where shall I find something
for a bursting heart.
- (55) *vanidi mehil'int'
koda peltne sin ujit'
veše vel'ent' od lomatin
veše gorodov tujit'* Look at the sky,
how the clouds fly,
all young people of the whole village,
they are all leaving to the town.
- (56) *ona toso viřent' alo
traktor moda vel'avti
mon aližiš iskrasinzi
di anšak přanzo čaravti* Over there by the forest,
a tractor is turning the soil,
my darling is in his Iskra (tractor),
and only shakes his head.
[Cf. 56, 61.]
- (57) *Gorbačov i Jeltsin
meže t'eve t'eid'e
Rossijaso žaro narodt
vačo peke kadid'e* Gorbachev and Yeltsin,
what sort of work did you do,
how many people in Russia,
you have left starving!
[Cf. 50, 57.]
- (58) *aida Vanja bazarov eh
ramatano pomila
šl'atanok, nardatanok
šed'e mazit' ult'anok* Let's go Vanya [Ivan] to the market, oh,
let's buy a whisk,
we (shall) wash, we (shall) wipe,
we shall be more beautiful.

Comments

1 On the 12 June 1991 the first free presidential elections were organized in Russia. Boris N. Yeltsin achieved an indisputable majority in the first round and was elected the first president of Russia. The third line is elliptic and the informant obviously noticed that a simple predicate as *jakit'* [walk.3PL] ‘they go’ that would semantically fill the gap does not metrically match to the 8-syllable pattern of the first line.

2 *davaj, jalgaj, šed'e veřga*
moronok targasińek
valske ranajak st'atano
di normanok p'radsińek
 (UPTMN 5: 175)

There are considerable similarities between the two variants in each line and the main difference is found in the word choice such as *kajasińek* ‘let us throw (it)’ (example 2) instead of *targasińek* ‘let us pull (it)’, *vid'imanok* ‘our sowing’ (example 2) instead of *(dy) normanok* ‘our quota’. The introduction *dajt'e jalgat* ‘let us, friends’ addresses a plural (example 2) instead of *davaj, jalgaj* ‘let us, friend’ that addresses a singular. Despite the lexical changes the number of syllables and the metrics of the chastushka remain the same.

3 *il'a jaka mon piřeva*
il'a tapa rosadat
il'a panše mazi mel'ga
il'a t'ejne dosadat
 (UPTMN 5: 230)

il'a jaka viřga-sadga
il'a tapa rosada
il'a večke moń alužam
il'a t'eje dosada
 (UPTMN 5: 231)

There is ample of variation in different versions of examples (6, 12, 30), and those published in UPTMN 5. In other versions than example (30) the chastushka consists of four imperative negations beginning with the auxiliary verb *il'a* ‘do not (2SG)’. Furthermore the chastushkas, except of example (30), bridge two thematic and mutually metaphoric sections, of which the first one is a garden (orchard, seedling) that one is not supposed to enter, the second one of an animate beloved maid or youngster that another one is not supposed to entice. The first one is manifested as *umar' sad* ‘apple orchard’ in example (6), two synonyms *sad* (< Russian *sad* id.) and *piře*

‘garden’ in example (12), the latter one in (UPTMN 5: 230), and finally as *vir'-sad* ‘forest-garden’ in (UPTMN 5: 231). The protected target of love is manifested as *t'ejt'er'* ‘girl’ in example (6), *ćora* ‘boy’ in example (12), *mazi* ‘beautiful’ and *aluža* ‘friend; beloved’ in (UPTMN 5: 230–231).

4 *karman častuškañ moramo*
 ešeñ eržañ kelñese
 partijañ programmant' lovnit'
 miñek erva vel'ese
 (UPTMN 5: 168)

šed'ak, šed'ak garmonija
 ñil'e-vet'e kelñese
 konstitucijant' lovnit'
 erva viška vel'ese
 (UPTMN 5: 234)

In comparison to the two parallel versions published in UPTMN example (8) seems to combine two distinct motives. Yet, this is an inherent characteristic of chastushkas as part of oral poetry. Metrically, the informant keeps the balance between the first and third line both consisting of eight syllables as a contrast to the second and fourth line consisting of seven syllables each. Consequently, the partitive (ablative) case is used as the case of object in *konstitucijado* in example (8) instead of *konstitucijant'* as in (UPTMN 5: 234).

5 This particular chastushka was first presented in Russian, but after some requests the informant performed it in Erzya. Nevertheless, the informant claimed that usually chastushkas do not have parallel variants but are sung separately in Russian and Erzya and have different themes.

šed'ak, Kol'a vešolasto
 garmoškiñeš tonšet'
 koda karmat u'rvakstamo
 sajmaka monseñ
 (UPTMN 5: 196)

garmonist moraka
 garmonijaš tonceñ
 dumandat řvjajama
 řvaks šavamak monceñ
 (MECh 27)

Unlike most other chastushkas presented in the current paper, example (10) does not pretend to keep a strict number of syllables, but allows a very free metric formula in each line. In the variants published in chastushka collections the rhythm and usual correspondence between lines 1 and 3 respectively 2 and 4 holds without deviation.

- 6 *sadso kasi umarina*
kud'rasozno sornovt'ni
mazi t'ejt'er', paro Nina
od programmant' nej jovt'ni
 (UPTMN 5: 168)

sadso kasi umarina
lopasonzo sornovt'ni
komsomolka mi'nek Lena
konstitucijant' jovt'ni
 (UPTMN 5: 234)

As in example (8), the same informant appears to combine themes in example (15), because the chastushka shares parts of two variants published in UPTMN. In this case, the thematic variation is based on the structural compatibility between lines 1 and 3 that consist of eight syllables in example (15) in contrast to the seven-syllable lines 2 and 4.

- 7 *mon alužam Moskov ošso*
mon žo e'ran vel'ese
cikordića kemt' moñ pil'gse
jupkam koto kel'ese
 (MECh 27)

The similarity between example (16) and the text published in MECh consists of a metric identity and the structure ABAB between the lines. Thematically the subject of the text locates herself in a village (*vel'ese*), whereas her beloved is in a distant city (Moscow, Samara). The span (*koto* 'six' or *šišem* 'seven') of the skirt is contrasted with the silk shirt in example (16). This chastushka has a parallel in Moksha in which these three elements are present as well:

zal'omaže Moskusa
jakaj šeraj kost'umsa
a mon t'äsa, vel'esa
jakan nil'e kemsä
 (SM 101)

8 The informant reported that he had learned this chastushka in Saransk (the capital of the Republic of Mordovia), although he himself was born and had lived in the Orenburgskaya Oblast further in the east. According to the informant, the majority of data recorded from him originates from the Orenburgskaya Oblast.

9 The informant said that he knew this chastushka from both Saransk and the Orenburgskaya Oblast.

10 *veře peste alopev*
čavo bočka keveři
sonś beřakške ćoriņes
vadřa t'ejt'er' eravi
 (UPTMN 5: 186)

This chastushka is based on two semantic contrasts: an empty bottle rolling down from the upper end to the lower end (in example [22] vice versa [!]), in the Moksha example (SM 57) below from the new end to the old end, and the miserable youngster longing for a beautiful girl. In example (22) the informant breaks the metric balance whereas in example (42) all lines consist of seven syllables.

od pesta sire pev
šava bočkat kevorgdiht'
kažnaj nolgu st'irt'i
mazi ćorat eraviht'
 (SM 57)

verd'e pesta alda pet'i
bočkañätñe kevorihht'
piče vel'ent' st'irñätñänd'i
mazi plat'jat eraviht'
 (SM 97)

pinkedsta keratav
šava bočka kevari
kažnaj kal'd'av ćorat'i
ćebär st'irñe eravi
 (SM 112)

11 *val'ma langso pivt'i lovso*
a stol langso ćapamo
mon alužam tuš kišt'eme
mon mel'ganzo ćapamo
 (UPTMN 5: 189)

The chastushka recorded from the informant is almost identical with that published in UPTMN 5. The number of syllables is identical and the most considerable change besides introducing the dialectal *mel'gando* in example (24) is the conversion of the gender of the beloved (*alužam* in UPTMN) from masculine to feminine (*večkemam* in example [24]).

12 The following couplet (Orenburgskaya Oblast) of the same informant resembles the chastushkas and consists of four lines, thematic turnovers and is based on rhymes and rhythm. The informant presented it as a children's song.

<i>dur-dur-durso</i>	Woarr-woarr-woarr,
<i>jakiñ mel'gat nurco</i>	I followed you in a sleigh,
<i>arašel'it' kudoso</i>	you were not at home,
<i>čuršeñ ponksot tuloso</i>	I put dibs on your trousers with a peg.

13 *pando práso samovar*
a pandalo čajnik
moñ alužam Moskovso
toso son načal'nik
 (UPTMN 5: 200)

pando práso samovar
pando alo čajnik
meže jalgat vantado
Fed'ajak načal'nik
 (UPTMN 5: 235)

The two first lines of example (29) and the two variants published in UPTMN are identical and the variation of the two latter lines is based on keeping the rhyme *čajnik* – *načal'nik* unchanged.

14 *kišt'emejak maštat*
moramojak maštat
a kolhozoñ robotant'
ovto ladso šaštat
 (UPTMN 5: 181)

There is only little variation between the Erzya (example [31], UPTMN) and Moksha variants (SM 134; see below). In the version published in UPTMN the subject of the text addresses to a second person singular whereas in the two other ones the subject is in the first person singular. In example (31) the informant applies the possibility to an unexpected thematic change characteristic of chastushkas by applying a humoristic lexical change *ovšejak* 'at all' instead of *ovto ladso* 'like a bear'.

kišt'imonga maštan
moramonga maštan
kak robotama karman
koda ofta šaštan
 (SM 134)

- 15 *t'e kodamo lišmapraš?*
čuviň, čuviň ved' araś
vaj, kodamo t'e ćoraś?
učiň, učiň son araś
 (UPTMN 5: 220)

- 16 *veřev varštan kovont'eň*
alov varštan lovont'eň
buti alužom kadsamam
mol'an prokuroront'eň
 (UPTMN 5: 183)

Example (33) is almost identical with (UPTMN 5: 183) that both like example (19) and the Moksha example below display the rhyme and spatial distinction between *kov* 'moon' (up) vs. *lov* 'snow' (down). In example (19) and UPTMN the subject threatens to prosecute his/her beloved, if (*žardo* 'when', *buti* 'if') (s)he is left alone whereas in example (33) the subject uses the past tense and emphasises that this has already taken place and, consequently, the subject will go to the prosecutor's. In the Moksha version the action is connected with being touched (*tokasamaň*) instead of being left.

vāri vanan kovt'i
alu vanan lovt'i
kodak kije tokasamaň
tujan prokurort'i
 (SM 27)

- 17 The theme Kosogor is associated with place where it was recorded, but not with where the singer comes from.

- 18 *Kol'a šed'ak, Kol'a šed'ak*
Kol'a il'a nužaldo
ćokšne alužot kevkst'ije
toňet' meři šed'amdo
 (UPTMN 5: 197)

There is only minor structural difference between example (37) and the version published in (UPTMN 5: 197), while the semantic actors of the two variants are identical.

In example (36) the subject uses a plural form (*kevkst'inek* 'we asked') instead of singular and a more analytic verb construction *karmavtinžet* 'he made you (do something)' instead a narrative reference *toňet' meři* in UPTMN.

- 19 *mon a mol'an pel'evene*
baňav orožjamo
lučše mol'an čoksné klubov
vadřa p'esaň vanomo
(UPTMN 5: 233)

The introduction of this chastushka and the two first lines are recorded from many informants. The beginning of the chastushka is based on a negation *mon a mol'an* 'I am not going to go' that suggests that another alternative will be presented. The variation between examples (1, 6, 22, 40) and (UPTMN 5: 233) is seen in the two latter lines that reveal the semantic culmination of the chastushka. In all cases the point of the text is revealed on the last line that shows similarity only between example (40) and (UPTMN 5: 233).

- 20 The correct form instead of *keřavit'* (a reflexive derivation of *keřams* 'cut, chop, hew' etc.) should be *keveřit'* (cf. examples [22] and [42]). The translation is based on the semantics of the corrected version.

- 21 *veřga l'ivt'i joroplan*
udalonzo pružina
ki kolhozso a roboti
mad'i apak užina
(UPTMN 5: 174)

- 22 In fact, the fourth line of the translation corresponds to the third line of the text, and the third line (the eye of a parasite) of the translation corresponds to the fourth line of the text.

Riho Grünthal <riho.grunthal@helsinki.fi>
Department of Finno-Ugrian Studies
P.O. Box 25
FI-00014 University of Helsinki