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© Marina Kutsaeva

MARI'S LANGUAGE AND ETHNIC IDENTITY IN AREAS OF THEIR COMPACT SETTLEMENT (BASED ON DATA FROM 2024–2025 SOCIOLINGUISTIC SURVEYS)

The article presents the results of sociolinguistic surveys conducted by the author among ethno-local Mari communities in Bashkortostan, Tatarstan, the Sverdlovsk and Kirov regions in 2024–2025. One of the questions in the sociolinguistic questionnaire concerned ethnic identity. Along with roots (birthplace and family) and culture (observance of traditions and customs), our respondents identified the Mari language as one of the key markers of ethnic identity. Based on 400 interviews, the paper analyses how often the language was identified as one of the ethnic markers depending on the respondent's local ethnic group, age, and level of language proficiency. The relationship between language and ethnicity is examined in the context of the current linguistic situations in Mari communities, where idioms are undergoing a language shift. In addition, the study of the respondents' linguistic biographies makes it possible to examine the influence of more specific factors on the role of language in the process of ethnic self-identification. The paper highlights ethnonyms used in certain Mari communities to refer to individuals who do not speak the ethnic language, and draws on additional materials from the Mari community in the Moscow region. The author concludes that the ethnic language remains a symbol of Mari identity in most of the above-mentioned communities and emphasizes the importance of maintaining the Mari language in order to preserve the boundaries of the ethnic group and its ethnocultural diversity.

Keywords: *Mari language, ethnic identity, ethno-local Mari communities, language shift, Mari language in education, traditional speakers, new speakers*

Author Info: Kutsaeva, Marina V. — Ph.D. in Philology, Senior Researcher, Department of Uralic and Altaic languages, Institute of Linguistics, Russian Academy of Sciences (Moscow, Russian Federation). E-mail: marina.kutsaeva@iling-ran.ru ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0112-2961>

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