

Book review

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August Ahlqvist: Tschuwaschisches Dialektwörterbuch. Kritisch ediert von Klára Agyagási und Eberhard Winkler (Veröffentlichungen der Societas Uralo-Altaica, 99). Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2023. Paperback €89.00. ISBN 978-3-447-12127-9.

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General issues

Chuvash is known to be an outlier in the Turkic language family in several respects, so its importance for any comprehensive comparative account of the Turkic language family is undisputed (Johanson 2021: 21–24, 90–91; Károly 2022: 12–16). Moreover, in order to draw empirically based conclusions in historical-comparative linguistics, one needs as much data as possible that is as accessible as possible for the given purpose. The book under review aims to provide such data, namely a critical edition of the Chuvash lexical material collected by the Finnish linguist August Ahlqvist in the 19th century. Two preliminaries should be mentioned, which are essential for the understanding of both the book and the present review. First, most of the data included in the dictionary come from the Viryal dialect of Chuvash, i.e., from the significantly less represented variety, as opposed to the Anatri dialect, which is the basis for the Chuvash literary language. Secondly, the book under review is a close follow-up of Agyagási & Winkler's publications of August Ahlqvist's *Tschuwaschiska* (Ahlqvist 2008, 2010).

The book is divided into four parts. The first part (pp. 7–24) introduces a few aspects of Chuvash phonetics and the transcription principles used in the edition, as well as the place of Ahlqvist's materials in the study of Chuvash. Unfortunately, it does not really introduce the book itself, especially its relation to the authors' preceding editions of August Ahlqvist's *Tschuwaschiska* (Ahlqvist 2008, 2010). It would have been quite easy to inform the reader of this fact, and it would have made some of the criticisms of the presentation of the language data (see below) essentially obsolete. The second part (pp. 25–36) provides a brief overview of August Ahlqvist's life, his fieldwork among the Chuvash people, and his importance for Chuvash studies. This part is very informative and helps the reader to relate Ahlqvist's material to the history of research on Chuvash more generally. The third part (pp. 37–294), which is the main body of the volume, contains the edited lexicon entries from Ahlqvist's materials published in Ahlqvist (2008). Most importantly, the entries are arranged alphabetically according to the Standard Chuvash cognates of the words found in Ahlqvist's materials, supplemented by a translation of the lemmas into German (Standard Chuvash form) and Russian or German (Ahlqvist Chuvash forms). Finally, the fourth part of the volume (pp. 295–330) contains two indexes, of the German and Russian translations, respectively, which are provided in the dictionary.

As a general assessment, it can be said that the book contains a wealth of invaluable data, carefully edited in a philological manner, and is a helpful supplement to Ahlqvist's (2008, 2010) *Tschuwaschiska*. The importance of the data and the logical and accessible structure of the dictionary are discussed in more detail in Section 2. Unfortunately, however, the presentation of the data has several shortcomings that make it rather difficult to access, as discussed in Section 3. Finally, Section 4 presents some thoughts on the representation of lexical material in the 21st century, especially in the context of digitization and open science issues.

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Philology at its best

As mentioned in the introduction, the greatest merit of the book is its systematic presentation of the Chuvash lexical material collected by August Ahlqvist in the 19th century. As the authors note (p. 9), Ahlqvist's material contains about 4,100 Chuvash lexemes, chiefly representing the Viryal dialect of Chuvash, i.e. the less described and less documented variety of the language. For this reason, and also because Viryal Chuvash displays several phonetic features that are absent in Anatri Chuvash, the publication of a such a large lexical database is invaluable for comparative Turkic linguistics.

The book under review, however, is not the first publication of Ahlqvist's Chuvash data, but rather an edited follow-up version of Ahlqvist (2008). The authors' contributions to the edition are most visible in the re-structuring and harmonization of the material in terms of the transcription of the data. In the present volume, the lexical entries are always accompanied by the Standard Chuvash cognate of the item listed by Ahlqvist; e.g. Ahlqvist Chuvash *orám* 'street' is correlated with Standard Chuvash *uram* 'id.' (p. 274). In addition, the dictionary is organized according to the Standard Chuvash forms instead of the forms noted by Ahlqvist. Although this editorial decision seems counterintuitive at first glance, it makes sense, since many items in Ahlqvist's material are attested in several forms by apparently different informants, e.g. *sára* ~ *sar* ~ *sárry* 'yellow' (p. 184). In addition, the lexical entries include the authors' German translations of the Standard Chuvash lemmas, as well as Ahlqvist's Russian translations of the items he collected himself. These translations are presented in two indexes in the fourth part of the book, making reverse searches also possible. Finally, all lexical entries contain the page number where the corresponding Chuvash item can be found in Ahlqvist (2008), which makes the editorial process quite transparent, since readers can easily compare any given item with the original manuscript in Ahlqvist (2008).

Consequently, the authors' careful edition of the Chuvash data can be characterized as an example of philology at its best, and I mean this in the most positive sense. Needless to say, such a task requires much time and effort, which is seldom recognized in the 21st century, and this is another reason why the book under review is a real achievement.

Who is this book for?

While the material in the book is invaluable, its accessibility suffers from several unfortunate shortcomings in the presentation of the data, as well as its lack of context. First, it is a real problem that no mention is made of the fact that the book is a follow-up to the authors' publications of Ahlqvist's *Tsçhuwasçhiska* in 2008 and 2010. Nowhere in the introduction is it explicitly mentioned that the book is related to those volumes, with all the consequences this entails, and it was only the sentence "Jede Formvariante [...] erscheint unter dem Lemmawort mit der Ortsangabe im Originalmanuskript" 'Each form variant [...] appears under the lemma word together with the location [i.e. page number, C.L.D.] in the original manuscript' (pp. 20–21, my translation) that made me aware of this fact. Similarly, the book lacks an introduction to the Chuvash language, its dialects, its importance for comparative Turkic linguistics, and similar background. Surely, one could argue that this is information that any trained linguist and/or Turcologist can be expected to be aware of. On the other hand, comparative approaches by definition deal with a number of different languages and varieties, and it is certainly helpful for any researcher to be introduced to a particular topic and language. This also leads me to mention that the dictionary unfortunately lacks English translations. Although German is an established language in Turcology, and I understand the wish to strengthen the use of non-English languages in scientific discourse, I also think that this choice significantly limits the potential readership of the book. I would therefore have recommended that the authors also include an English translation of each lemma. Finally, the transcription of the data – though consistent in itself – lacks a contextualization that would relate it to transcription systems such as the International Phonetic Alpha-

bet (IPA), Finno-Ugric Transcription (FUT), or the Turcological transcription system presented by Johanson (2021).

To sum up, the book under review unfortunately gives the impression that it can be useful for people who are already very familiar with Chuvash. However, it appears to be rather inaccessible for a wider audience.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the Viryal Chuvash data collected by August Ahlqvist in the 19th century is of inestimable importance for comparative Turkic linguistics and beyond. Thus, the central merit of the book under review is that this data has been critically edited and published. Unfortunately, however, I must say that the data remains somewhat inaccessible for at least two reasons. First, a solid command of German is needed to access the data, and second, the valuable data is hardly contextualized by the authors. Although the introductory chapters on August Ahlqvist and his work are interesting to read and are certainly valuable in their own right, a more detailed introduction to the Chuvash language, its dialects, its guiding transcription principles, and so on would have been very helpful to the reader.

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