

Russian in Beserman Oral Discourse: Global Influence and Interaction

Olga Biryuk, Moscow State University (rorgard@yandex.ru)
Maria Usacheva, Moscow State University (mashastroeva@gmail.com)

This article concerns the Besermans' language. It is not yet clear if it is a dialect of Udmurt or a separate language. Kelmakov [Kelmakov 1998] names this idiom among the types of Udmurt dialects. On the other hand, according to Teplyashina, Besermans are “an ethnic group whose language and culture are close to those of Udmurts” [Teplyashina 1970: 5]. As for Besermans, they consider themselves to be a separate ethnic group speaking a unique language.

It is also not clear if the Besermans' language descends from Udmurt or from another idiom of Turkic origin. The Besermans feel themselves to be a mysterious nation with unknown origin. Nevertheless this problem goes beyond the scope of this article. What is important for us is that nowadays Besermans live together with Tatars, Udmurts and Russians, so the idiom has been influenced by the languages of these nations. We will try to show how the Russian language has influenced the language of Besermans living in Shamardan (Jukamensky district, Udmurtia). The Russian influence will be demonstrated with examples taken from 19 texts (about 2,5 hours of oral speech) recorded and transcribed in Shamardan (a Beserman village) in January and July 2010. Looking through the texts we can see Russian influence at all language levels.

I. Phonetics

Unfortunately we have a little to say about phonetics because the investigation of this field is still in progress, so yet we don't have a complete picture of the Beserman phonetic system itself. But the Russian influence on this level doubtless exists. For example, in Beserman system there is no sound [x], but it may occur in rapid speech in Russian loanwords. Compare:

(1) the Besermans' language, fieldnotes:

kwin', n'ul', vit'-et'i-jez petux.
three four five-Ord-P.3 chicken_{rus}

[counting the figures] *three, four, and the fifth is a chicken.*

Such pronunciation of the word denoting ‘chicken’ is treated by the native speakers we have worked with as being Russian (not Beserman). In their judgment, the Beserman word for chicken is [petuk].

There is also influence in suprasegmental domain. Thus, the stress in the Beserman language generally falls on the final syllable of the word (except some onomatopoeic words and exclamations). But in fluent speech some Russian loanwords may occur (not very often, but nevertheless) with Russian stress.

II. Morphology

There are loans from Russian in inflectional and even in the derivational morphology.

II. 1. Inflectional markers

In our corpus the following morphological markers borrowed from Russian occur:

A. Imperative (only in the first person):

(2) the Besermans' language, fieldnotes:

Maša, davaj aš'mes kuč'k-o-m skal-jos dor-iš'en.
Masha Imp.1_{rus} Refl.1Pl start-Fut-1Pl cow-Pl neighbourhood-Abl

Masha, let us start with the cows.

The marker *davaj* seem to fill the lacuna in the Beserman system because the imperative of the first person does not exist in the Besermans' language [Teplyashina 1970: 236].

Optative:

(3) the Besermans' language, fieldnotes:

mar-ke otân... aj, olo kâž'â vâldâ... ja goroč'ka, puskaj med lu-o-z...
that-Cond there DM_{rus} or how DM DM little.hill_{rus} OPT_{rus} OPT be-Fut-3

There is something... auch, or as it is known... well, let it be a little hill...

Compare:

(3a) Russian:

puskaj bud'-et.
Opt be.Fut-3Sg
Let it be.

As it can be seen from (3), here we actually have the case of double marking with one Beserman marker and one marker borrowed from Russian. It appears to be the most common strategy of borrowing which can be found on all language levels except phonetics (such examples will be presented later).

B. Debitative:

(4) the Besermans' language, fieldnotes:

i van' tînad otân lu-o-z veloš'iped, vel'ik otân tînad dolžen lu-ôno.
and is you.Gen1 there must.be-Fut-3 bicycle_{rus} bike_{rus} there you.Gen1 must_{rus} must.be-Deb
And you must have in there a bicycle, you must have a bike in there.

Here we have the double marking. Examples without the double marking did not occur in our corpus (and examples with double marking occur extremely seldom).

C. Inchoative:

(5) the Besermans' language, fieldnotes:

i davaj až'-lan' mînî-nî.
and Inch_{rus} forward-All go-Inf
And they went forward.

The corresponding Beserman construction is “*kuč'kânî* ‘to start’ + infinitive”. Russian inchoative marker can be borrowed also through contamination with this construction (i. e. through double marking, as we have seen before). Compare:

(6) the Besermans' language, fieldnotes:

l'eg'it'... l'eg'it' pi pešt-i-z i davaj žug'iš'kâ-nî kuč'k'-i-z-î.
young young man fall.down-Pst-3 and Inch_{rus} fight-Inf begin-Pst-3-Pl
The young man fell down, and (they) began to fight.

D. Negation:

(7) the Besermans' language, fieldnotes:

petuk n'e so.
chicken_{rus} Neg_{rus} this
This is not a chicken.

A marker of negation borrowed from Russian occurs in the corpus occasionally. The speakers strongly tend to use the Beserman marker *evâl*.

E. Superlative:

There is no Beserman superlative marker. The word *samoj* functioning as superlative has Russian origin [Teplyashina 1970: 179]:

(8) the Besermans' language, fieldnotes:

samoj umoj
Superlat_{rus} good
the best

II. 2. Derivational markers

The Besermans' language demonstrates a good example of derivational morpheme borrowing. There is a strategy to take a Russian derivational suffix *-n'ik* (which in this case changes to *-n'n'ig*) and to add it to a verbal noun to build a noun denoting a location where the action denoting by the verb usually takes place or can take place:

(9) the Besermans' language, fieldnotes:

val dômâ-n'n'ig
horsetether-n'ik
the place where horses are usually or can be tethered (generally a stake in the field where horses are tethered while grazing or a stake in the fence where horses are tethered while the owner is having dinner)

A very interesting thing here is that Besermans strongly differentiate *-n'n'ig* as a Beserman derivational morpheme and *-n'ik* as a component of Russian loanwords. It becomes apparent through the fact that Beserman words derived with *-n'n'ig* always end with a voiced consonant [g] (see above), and, on the other hand, Russian loanwords containing *-n'ik* always end with a voiceless sound [k]:

(10) the Besermans' language, fieldnotes:

par-n'ik
steam-n'ik
brewing teapot (in Russian it is literally the place for scalding tea, but in Beserman the word seems to be borrowed as a whole)

III. Vocabulary

In our corpus of texts two cases of borrowing the vocabulary units occurred. In the first case, the new word is coming together with the new actual. With the lapse of some time, such words are phonetically and morphologically adopted:

(11) the Besermans' language, fieldnotes:

piosmurt lokt-e traktor dor-e traktor-z-e zavod'-t-ânâ.
man come.back-Prs.3Sg tractor_{rus} neighbourhood-III tractor-P.3-Acc_{rus} start.up-Tr-Inf
A man is coming back to a tractor to start it up (compare Russian zavod' 'i-t' 'to run up' where -t' is an infinitive suffix).

But there are some cases in our corpus which show no adaptation (see (3) above).

In the second case, the Russian word replaces the Beserman one. In this case the word also can be phonetically (12) or/and morphologically (13) adopted:

(12) the Besermans' language, fieldnotes:

pič'i pi vel't'-emân č'ašja-je.
little boy walk-Res forest-III_{rus}
Little boy went to the forest (compare Russian č'aš'a 'a thick forest').

(13) the Besermans' language, fieldnotes:

odig-âz pâd-âz gol'ik odig-âz noski-jen.
one-Poss3 leg-Poss3 bare one-Poss3 sock-Instr/Comit_{rus}
One leg is bare and the other is in the sock (the Russian word noski is a plural form of a word nosok 'sock'; note also that there is an old Beserman word pâdnâr 'sock, socks').

In the case of replacing a Beserman word through a Russian one also a semantic shift may occur. A good example of this is the word *sad*. In Russian it denotes a plot planted with trees, bushes and flowers or trees and bushes growing on such plot [Dal 1978]. In Beserman this word has replaced the word *č'ešpel'* 'bushes, small young trees' and has acquired a meaning 'leaf-bearing tree' (having in this meaning also a plural form). (As far as we know, there is no Beserman word expressing the concept of a leaf-bearing tree – as there is no Beserman word denoting the coniferous tree).

There also can be no phonetic or morphological adaptation of Russian words used instead of Beserman ones:

(14) the Besermans' language, fieldnotes:

tabere Paša L'emskoj-ên opet', korka š'er-a-z, **dal'n'ij** korka š'er-a-z.
 then Pasha L'emskij-Iness again_{rus} house behind-Iness-P.3 distant_{rus} house behind-Iness-P.3
And then, Pasha is now in Lemskij (a settlement near Shamardan) *again, behind the house, behind the distant house* (note that the Russian word *dal'n'ij* 'distant' is used instead of the Beserman widespread word *kâd'okâš'* 'distant'; bold type indicates stress).

Here we must say a few words about the difference among words belonging to different morphological classes with respect to the degree of adaptation. First of all, pronouns are never adopted. Numerals are adopted extremely seldom. Thus, we know only one numeral adopted from Russian - *pervoj* 'first'. For postpositions we also know only one case of substitution by a Russian word. Namely, the Beserman postposition *mestaje* (*mesta*-Ill) 'instead of' is loan translation of the Russian preposition *vm'esto* (*v-mesto* = in-place.Acc) 'instead of'. Adverbs are adopted rarely, and their degree of phonetic adaptation is close to that of nouns which may either be adopted (consider the word *opet'* 'again' in (14) which in Russian is pronounced as [op'at']; this word has completely substituted an old Beserman word *nâš'* 'again') or not (15):

(15) the Besermans' language, fieldnotes:

obratno tatč'e lokt-i-z.
 backwards_{rus} here return-Pst-3
[She] returned here, backwards (there is a widespread Beserman adverb *berlan'* 'backwards').

Nouns are adopted the most often, and they may be phonetically or/and semantically adopted or not (see examples above). There are also cases of grammatical adaptation of nouns, most of them concerning the number of the noun (see (13) above).

Adjectives are often adopted, and they may also demonstrate phonetic and semantic shift or not (see (14) again).

Verbs are in generally adopted without semantic shift but they are very good adopted phonetically. Furthermore, Beserman demonstrates two productive models of verbal adaptation. First, some verbs are adopted through taking the verbal stem (phonetically adopted, if necessary) and attaching Beserman inflexions – sometimes even derivational suffixes – to it. The second (and much more universal) strategy is to take the infinitive of the Russian verb and to attach the inflectional forms of the Beserman verb *karânâ* 'to do' to it. To use such a strategy is often the first reaction during the speech generation even if a good Beserman verbal equivalent exists. But while speaking to us the Besermans often corrected themselves at once.

Conjunctions are adopted very actively replacing the Beserman ones. In general they are adopted neither phonetically nor functionally. Compare:

(16) the Besermans' language, fieldnotes:

ben, so **daže** n'e č'už-g'ez, a kâč'â-ke go[rd]... marâm...
 yes it even_{rus} not_{rus} yellow-Compar but_{rus} someway-Cond red maybe
Yes, it is even not yellow but red or the like... maybe...

Finally, during the borrowing of words the “double marking” of sense may occur. Thus, a Russian word expressing some concept may occur together with a Beserman one which has this concept in its semantic structure as a component. Compare:

(17) the Besermans' language, fieldnotes:

mōnam even' bol'she kureg-jos-ō.
 I.Gen1 have.no.anymore more_{rus} hen-Pl-P.1
I have no hens anymore.

IV. Syntax

According to our corpus, Russian influence on Beserman syntax was not at all as huge as this on the vocabulary. There is a large amount of Beserman constructions which in our corpus (and according to our experience) are never replaced with Russian ones. But nevertheless cases of substitution do occur. The first of them is the construction with the sentential actants:

(18) the Besermans' language, fieldnotes:

až'-i-z što nāl murt š'ud-e odig-ez petux-ez evāl, pič'i pi
 see-Pst-3 Conj_{rus} girl human feed-Prs.3Sg one-P.3 chicken_{rus}-Poss3 not little boy
 petux punna mōn-i-z biž'-ōsa.
 chicken_{rus} for go-Pst-3 run-Conv
He saw that the girl was feeding [birds] and that one chicken was missing, and the boy ran for the chicken.

Compare:

(18a) Russian:

uv'id'e-l-Ø što d'evuška korm'-it kur-Ø.
 see-Pst-M.Sg Conj girl feed-Prs.3.Sg hen-Gen.Pl
He saw that a girl was feeding hens.

The second construction is the comparative one:

(19) the Besermans' language, fieldnotes:

so kak budto ž'až'egpi-jez-lōš' bāž-z-e kurč'-e n'i.
 he Compar_{rus} gosling-P.3-Gen2 tail-Poss3-Acc bite-Prs:3Sg Magn
It seems that he is biting the gosling's tail.

Russian and Beserman comparative words also can be used together forming a construction with double marking:

(20) the Besermans' language, fieldnotes:

so tin' pānāpi-jen tuš'-en visk-ōn kad' kak by.
 it well puppy-Instr/Comit through-Instr/Comit between-Iness like like_{rus}
Well, it seems to be between a puppy and a through.

The third construction is the coordinative one. The Beserman coordinative constructions with conjunction *no...no* ‘and’ is often replaced with the Russian one with conjunction *i* ‘and’. It should be noted that the Russian construction occurs much more often than the Beserman one. Besides, the “double marking” may also occur here:

(21) the Beserman's language, fieldnotes:

l'eg'it' pi-z-e no miš'k-e i jā... jārč'ā-ti-z kutā-sa vu-e donga.
 young man-P.3-Acc and wash-Prs.3Sg and_{rus} hair-Prolat-P.3 catch-Conv water-III push.Pst.3
[He] washes the young man and after catching [him] by his hair pushes [him] into the water.

V. Discourse

According to our corpus, Beserman oral discourse contains three groups of markers (with respect of their supposed origin): i. Beserman markers, ii. markers borrowed from Russian,

iii.tmarkers with unknown origin. As for the Russian markers, their borrowing in some cases demonstrate the general tendency of combining the Russian and the Beserman variants:

(22) the Besermans' language, fieldnotes:

ja ladno, pun-i-d ke pun-i-d.
 well well_{rus} put-Pst-2 Cond put-Pst-2
Ok, if you have put [it] than you have put [it].

Another strategy is to replace one of the components of a complex Russian discourse marker with a Beserman equivalent of this component:

(23) the Besermans' language, fieldnotes:

nu ten'.
 well here
Well, we've finished.

Beserman *ten'* 'here' corresponds to Russian *vot* 'here', and *nu ten'* in (24) is used just as Russian marker *nu vot*.

Russian discourse markers may be also borrowed directly:

(24) the Besermans' language, fieldnotes:

bur-la-š'an', otân tin' na marâm eto... ooo, oj, bl'in...
 right-Adv-Abl there here Emph that DM_{rus} oh oh DM_{rus}
On the right side, there is... hm, oh, oh, damn...

Finally, in our corpus occurs a good amount of cases of code-switching like (25):

(25) the Besermans' language, fieldnotes:

bakč'a-ja-z sâl-e. vot vo sâl-e, sâl-e, a ja
 kitchen.garden-Iness-P.3 stand-Prs.3Sg DM_{rus} DM_{rus} stand-Prs.3Sg stand-Prs.3Sg Conj_{rus} me_{rus}
duma-l-a uže... e, ani-je! malpa-j n'i gurt-a-z pâr-i-z šuâsa.
 think-Pst-F.Sg_{rus} now_{rus} DM mother-Poss1 think-Prt now house-III-P.3 enter-Pst-3 Conj
She is in the kitchen garden, here, here she is, and I was sure that she was there, she was, oh, my gosh! I was sure, that she had entered the house (underlined fragment of the sentence is in Russian).

Code-switching seems not to be motivated by any external factors. Besermans are likely to keep in mind two language systems and to switch between them freely.

Observing all cases of Russian influence on the Besermans' language which are presented in our corpus of texts we can see that the degree of influence is not as great as it might seem to be. A really great amount of units borrowed from Russian essentially appear only among nouns, but such loanwords tend to be phonetically, morphologically and even semantically adopted. Loanwords belonging to other parts of speech either occur seldom or are phonologically adopted. Furthermore, there are several common strategies of borrowing (for example, "karânâ 'to make' + infinitive" or "double marking"). As for morphology, there are not many tools borrowed, most of them fulfilling the lacunas in the Beserman system. The most frequent discourse markers in general have Beserman origin. The syntax practically has not been influenced by Russian. Even the new words are produced (although with the suffix with Russian origin which has been reinterpreted). In the discourse of 25-30 years old speakers there are more adopted constructions and morphological borrowed units than in the discourse of 60-85 year old people, but the disparity is not very big. A possible reason is that young Besermans use their mother tongue while talking to each other and to their relatives.

To sum up we should say that Russian have influenced certain parts of the Beserman language system. Nevertheless the Besermans' language remains a distinct system which is still able to reinterpret the units borrowed from Russian. The current stage of the idiom allows it to live. But nevertheless it is supposed to die in approximately 50 years because the people under 20 do not speak Beserman, and the idiom is not taught at school. Beserman is supposed to be the

language dying primarily not because of the contact influence but through sociolinguistic reasons.

References

- Dal V.I.* Tolkovyj slovar zhivogo velikorusskogo jazyka. V. 1—4. Moskva, 1978.
- Kelmakov, V.K.* Kratkij kurs udmurtskoj dialektologii. Vvedenije. Fonetika. Morfologija. Dialektnyje teksty. Bibliografija. Izhevsk, 1998.
- Tepljashina, T.I.* Jazyk Besermian. Moskva, 1970.