

# The order of the converb and the negation verb in the Mari converb construction: A corpus-based study

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**Mari** (Finno-Ugric, Uralic), along with its neighboring language **Chuvash** (Oghur branch, Turkic), is distributed in the Middle Volga region, Russia. Both languages are core members of the Volga-Kama sprachbund (Helimski 2003). The contact between them has been extremely close, leading to a profound symbiosis (Johanson 2000).

Both languages have the negative element which precedes a verb: Mari has the negation verb, which precedes the connegative form of a verb (e.g., *it tol* [NEG.IMP.2SG come] “Don’t come”). Chuvash has the negative particle *an*, which precedes the imperative form of a verb (e.g., *an kil* [NEG come.IMP.2SG] “Don’t come”). In the converb construction, the converb normally occurs before the negative element (“the CVB-NEG type” hereinafter) (e.g., Mari *kalas-en ot kert* [speak-CVB NEG.PRS.2SG be.able.to] “You can’t say that”; Chuvash *il-se an kay* [take-CVB NEG go] “Don’t take it with you”). However, it can also occur after the negative element (“the NEG-CVB type” hereinafter) (e.g., Mari *ot kalas-en kert*; Chuvash *an il-se kay*). How often and in what condition does the NEG-CVB type occur? If there are differences between the two languages, what are the factors?

On Mari, Riese et al. (2022) describe that very rarely, one can also encounter converbs between the negation verb and the connegative form, when the converb and the connegative form are an aspectual auxiliary construction. However, no quantitative data is provided. On Chuvash, Hishiyama (2022) found that 1) the frequency of the NEG-CVB type is about 1/6 of the frequency of the CVB-NEG type, and 2) the NEG-GER type can occur regardless of whether the imperative form of a verb is an auxiliary verb or not.

This study aims to answer the research questions by conducting a quantitative survey on Mari and comparing the results with the data of Chuvash. The corpus used is the main corpus of Meadow Mari Corpora (size: 5.5 million words). It is mainly composed of internet articles. The survey revealed that the NEG-CVB type is less common and more restricted in Mari than in Chuvash: 1) the frequency of the NEG-CVB type is 6/4420 of the frequency of the GER-NEG type, and 2) five of the six examples of the NEG-CVB type contains a connegative form of an auxiliary verb. These results suggest that the negation verb and the connegative verb form are tied to one another more tightly in Mari than the negative particle and the imperative verb form in Chuvash.

The low frequency suggests that the NEG-CVB type is a newly emerged uncanonical construction in both languages. This construction must have emerged because of the speaker's recognition of the converb construction as "a single verb". Mari primarily allows this construction when it includes an auxiliary verb because, as Johanson (1995) demonstrates, it is tied to the converb more tightly than the lexical verb.

The NEG-CVB type is not found in other Uralic languages in the Volga-Kama area. Mari allows this construction because it has the highly developed auxiliary verb construction due to the contact with neighbouring Turkic languages including Chuvash.

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