

Lexical markers of inferentiality, epistemic modality and evidentiality in Meadow Mari

Meadow Mari is a Uralic language spoken in the Volga-Kama region of Russia. Areally, it belongs to the languages of the so-called „Great Evidential Belt”, a territory which strips from the Balkans through the Asian steppe region and the Far East, which is the most significant locality for grammatical evidentiality, both in size of land and in the number and diversity of languages spoken in the region (Diewald – Smirnova 2010). As such, evidentiality, i.e. the grammatical marking of the source of the information (Aikhenvald 2004) has long been believed to be encoded in the past tense system of the Mari language (possibly as a Turkic influence, cf. Bereczki 2002), meaning that the speaker’s choice between the 1st and 2nd past tense is determined by whether the information is eye-witnessed or not.

(1) *Kürtnəgorno stancij salan-əš.*
railway station collapse-PST1.3SG
'The railway station (has) collapsed.' (Nelson & Vedernikova 2017)

(2) *Kürtnəgorno stancij salan-en.*
railway station PST2.3SG
'The railway station (has) collapsed.' (Nelson & Vedernikova 2017)

Similar motivation is assumed of the speaker’s choice between the compound past tenses (the 3rd and 4th past tense). In 3rd past tense, the particle *əl'e* is used when the action was directly observed by the speaker, while in the 4th past tense, the particle *ulmaš* is used to imply uncertainty or inference (Riese et al. 2019).

(3) *Kürtnəgorno stancij salan-en əl'e.*
railway station collapse-PST2.3SG PCL
'The railway station collapsed.' (Nelson & Vedernikova 2017)

(4) *Kürtnəgorno stancij salan-en ulmaš.*
railway station collapse-PST2.3SG PCL
'It turns out the railway station collapsed.' (Nelson & Vedernikova 2017)

These claims have been repeatedly challenged (Kozlov – Golosov 2017) and given a more detailed view (Nelson – Vedernikova – Bradley 2018, Sapasheva 2018), but so far, the research of evidentiality and inferentiality in Meadow Mari has been restricted to the the past tense system. The aim of this talk is to shed light on the epistemic, inferential and evidential marking in present tense in the use of modal particles in Meadow Mari, such as *dər*, *dokan*, *očəni*, *mozəč*, *ala*, etc. (Riese et al. 2019). These particles, according to the sources, express various degrees of uncertainty, but their exact usage, especially in terms of inferential or non-eyewitnessed value have so far not been subject to detailed research. For my research, I use the audio of my own fieldwork conducted on Meadow Mari speakers eliciting the Family Problems Picture Task (San Roque et al. 2012), completed by corpus research from the Meadow Mari Social Media Corpus of 3,59 million words. Preliminary results show that some of the modal particles, paired with present tense indicative, are able to encode not only epistemic and inferential, but evidential value as well.

Sources:

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