Impersonals, passives, and related phenomena in Permic languages

From a functional viewpoint, impersonal constructions express events where the agent (or in a broader sense, the instigator or initiator) is demoted in some way (Malchukov & Siewierska 2011). This is a shared property with passive constructions where the patient is promoted (cf. Siewierska 2013). The border between the two construction types is not clear-cut; furthermore, it remains debatable if distinct impersonal and passive domains can be distinguished in the Permic languages. The present paper aims to provide a classification of these phenomena in Udmurt and Komi-Permyak from a typological point of view.

Although numerous markers of impersonality have been outlined in contemporary Udmurt (F. Gulyás & Speshilova 2014), I will concentrate on the reflexive marker -śk and the so-called predicative form of the past participle -emyn. The former is a polyfunctional suffix expressing a wide range of meanings from reflexives to middles (1) that also serves as a marker of agent demotion (2). The suffix -emyn can also appear in impersonal passive constructions (3).

(1) *Ös   ušt-iśk-e.*
    door   open-REFL-3SG
    'The door opens.'

(2) *Tatyn   ekt-iśk-i-z.*
    here   dance-REFL-PST-3SG
    'There was dancing here.'

(3) *Tatyn   kynt-emyn.*
    here   freeze(intr.)-PTCP.PASS.PST
    'It is freezing here.'

The three structures illustrated above have their historically connected counterparts in Komi-Permyak. The reflexive marker -ś is among others used in reflexive (4) and impersonal (5) contexts (with impersonality in this example indicating non-agentivity), while the past tense marker, which is syncretic with the participle suffix -öma, often appears in structures considered impersonal or passive (6).

(4) *Maša   mišśi-ś-ö.*
    Masha   wash-REFL-3SG
    'Masha washes herself.'

(5) *Menam   onmöśśi-ś-öma.*
    I.GEN   fall_asleep-REFL-PTCP.PASS.PST
    'I fell asleep (unintentionally).'

(6) *Žyr-yn   džimľaś-ömaś.*
    room-INE   clean_up-PST2.3SG
    'It has been cleaned up in the room.'

As can be seen from the examples, the polyfunctionality of the reflexive and the past participle suffixes complicates the classification of the impersonal and passive domain. As a consequence, it is better to describe these phenomena as a continuum from middles to passives. The present talk is an attempt to answer the following questions:

(i) What morphosyntactic similarities and differences can be found in constructions with reflexive and participle markers?
(ii) What differences can be outlined among these constructions in terms of their usage?
(iii) How can these differences be explained?

The data used in the present paper has been elicited from native speakers as well as from different corpora.

References
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