Mari retrospectivizing particles as markers of epistemic authority and primacy

This presentation discusses the epistemic functions of Mari retrospectivizing particles *ôľe*, *ulmaš* (Meadow Mari) and *ôľô*, *ôlôn* (Hill Mari). Morphosemantically representing 3rd person singular past tense conjugation of copular verb 'to be', the primary function of these 'was'-elements is to form analytic past tenses from present expression in a process called retrospective shift (see Plungian & van der Auwera 2006). The sentence-final particles shift the temporal interpretation of the present tense into its actual temporal location past from the speaker, as in example (1) with the so-called analytic imperfect tense:

(1) Meadow Mari (Onchyko 6/1996: 23)
šarn-et   čaj,   kuze   tušto   jüštôl-ăna   ôľe?
remember-2SG   maybe   how   there   swim-1PL   ôľe
'You remember maybe, how we used to swim there?' (Literally: [we swim there] + [so it **was**])

However, there are a lot of yet unexplained occurrences, where the particle structures seem to be used without a clear temporal motivation. In the answer in (2b), for instance, the particle does not cause a reading of pastness, but the clause is to be read in present tense:

(2) Meadow Mari (Social media corpus)
(a) *a   te   pal-eδa,   sanδalβož   moγaj   peleδôš   ruš-la?*
    but   2PL   know-2PL   lily.of.the.valley   what.kind.of   flower   Russian-COMP
 '– Do you know, what flower lily of the valley is in Russian?'

(b) *môj-e   o-m   pale   ôľe* ☺☹☺
    1SG-EMPH   NEG-1SG   know.CNG   ôľe
'– I do not know ☺☹☺'

Examples like this indicate that the particles carry also more abstract meanings than just those of temporal locating. While the current accounts on evidentiality of the Mari particles concentrate on the variation between *ôľe/ôľô* and *ulmaš/ôlôn*, claiming that it is based on a semantic dichotomy between firsthand vs. non-firsthand source of information (e.g. Skribnik & Kehayov 2018: 536–539), the starting point of this presentation is the epistemic deep structure of the particle-based tense constructions in general. In sense in Evans (2005), I see them primarily as multiple perspective constructions that distinguish between different observer positions and indicate thus the speaker's epistemic stance towards the described event. This perspective-based approach is able to count for both temporal and non-temporal functions of the particles.

   The analysis is conducted with notions of epistemic authority and primacy (for introductions, see Mushin 2001 and Grzech 2020, respectively) in order to explain both semantic and pragmatic dimensions of the particles. Based on a corpus study with native-consulted examples, the inclusion of a particle in a clause modifies the level of speaker's commitment towards the truth value of the utterance. In interactional level, the marking of authority turns into an information structural

strategy, where the speaker demonstrates their epistemic primacy over their interlocutor to produce new information to the discourse.

Data and references

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