The discourse marker NU in Uralic languages: towards a comparative description

Iuliia Zubova, Gerson Klumpp, Elena Markus, Denys Teptiuk, Triin Todesk, Marili Tomingas, Eda-Riin Tuuling
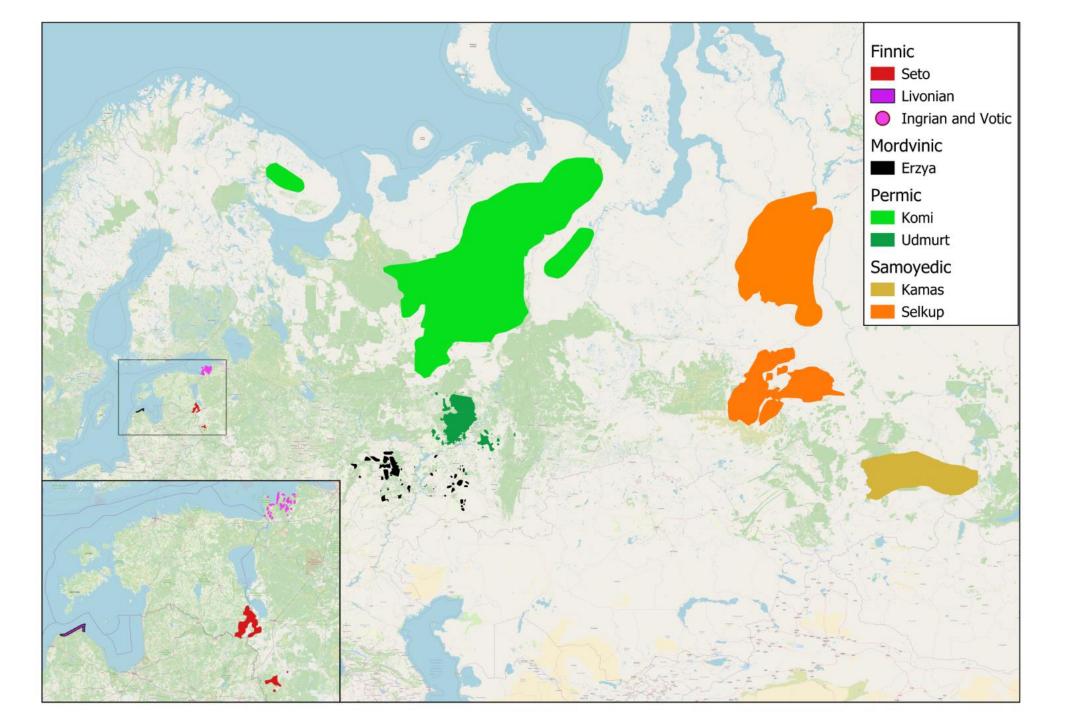
(University of Tartu)

Introduction

Project "Grammar of discourse particles in Uralic languages" (University of Tartu)

Peter Auer and Yael Maschler (2016) **NU / NÅ:** *A Family of Discourse Markers Across the Languages of Europe and Beyond.*
Covered Uralic languages:

- Estonian *no(o)h* (L. Keevalik);

- Finnish *no* (M.-L. Sorjonen & H. Vepsäläinen).

Finnic
- Seto
- Livonian
- Ingrian and Votic

Mordvinic
- Erzya

Permic
- Komi
- Udmurt

Samoyedic
- Kamas
- Selkup

3

Data: language vitality

Disruption Scale (Ethnologue.com)	Language
Developing	Erzya
Threatened	Udmurt, Komi, Selkup
Shifting	Seto
Nearly Extinct	Ingrian
Dormant	Livonian
Extinct	Kamas

NU in Uralic languages

- Seto, Ingrian, Erzya, Komi, Udmurt, Selkup, Kamas < Russian *nu*
- Livonian < Latvian *nu*

1. Only Russian borrowing (*nu*)
2. An older element (*no*) + Russian borrowing (*nu*) merged functionally
3. An older element (*no*) + Latvian borrowing (*nu*) merged functionally

Data: competing markers

	Most frequent form	**Less frequent form**	**Other Competing markers**
Livonian	*nu(h)*	*no(h)*	
Seto	*no(h)*	*nu(h)*	
Ingrian	*no*	*nu*	-
Komi	*no*	-	-
Erzya	*nu*	-	*ja* (<Turkic), *eŕga*
Udmurt	*nu*	-	*ja, ma* (<'what')
Selkup	*nu*	*no*	*ja*
Kamas	*no, nǫ*	*nu*	

NU in Uralic languages

(1) Ingrian (dialogue within a narrative)

01 hää käi korjaiž näidä heiniä	01 She went, gathered some grass,
jogahiželle andoi v'eralle miulle i itselle otti	gave it to each: to Vera, to me, and took (one) for herself.
02 no ken že enžimäižeekš mäňnöö	02 "**NU** (well/so), who will go first?"
03 raja šaňnoo miä mään	03 Raja says, "I will go."
04 a v'era šaňnoo ol'a šiiž šiä määd a šiiž miä mään	04 And Vera says, "Olja, then you will go and then I will go."
05 no davajt'e šiiž	05 "**NU** let's (do it) then!"
06 no i raja algoi=gi	06 **NU** and Raja did begin.

Data: corpora

Spoken (all except Erzya)
everyday narratives: memories, comments about traditional holidays and everyday life
folk narratives
several native speakers in spontaneous conversations
two native speakers talking during linguistic experiments
dictionary work (native speaker's comments on particular lexemes)

Written (Erzya, Udmurt)
fiction
blogs
media

Data

Bilingual speakers (second language: Russian/Estonian/Latvian).

Code-switching phenomena in the texts.

The effect of talking to a researcher who is not a (native) speaker of the language.

Data: Corpus frequencies

Corpus	No of occurences	Corpus size in words	NU frequency **per thousand words**
Livonian	512	~ 66 000	7,7
Seto	2297	~270 000	8,5
Ingrian	200	~ 20 000	10
Beserman Udmurt	1200	210 208	5,9
Iźva Komi	469	~ 50 000	9,4
Kamas	174	63 824	2,7
Selkup	225	81 498	2,7
Erzya	723	2 621 422	0,27
Udmurt	1068	9 562 379	0,11

Motivation and aim: Complexity of structural positions

NU can occur in various structural positions in discourse:

- discourse-opening, discourse-closing;
- in initiative turns, in responsive turns;
- stand-alone, utterance-initial, utterance-medial, (utterance-final);
- all sentence types can host NU.

Motivation and aim: Multitude of alleged functions

Kuosmanen & Multisilta (1999: 52) on 313 instances of Russian *nu*:

- **<u>Beginning</u> a question** (5.4%), **a request** (5.4%), an **answer**/response (34.2%), a new topic/subtopic (6.1%), an example (0.6%), an addition (10.2%), reported speech (1.9%), explanations or evaluations (1.9%)
- **Returning** to an earlier topic (5.4%); **ending** an episode or a topic (2.6%)
- **Shifting** from one event of narration to another (9.6%)
- **Metatextual** statements (0.6%), **comments** on the present situation (3.2%)
- **Turning** to the respondent (0.3%)
- **Searching** for information (2.9%), **finding** the information sought (4.2%)
- **Emotive** function (3.5%); **filler** (1.9%)

Motivation and aim

Looking for a unified framework:

- a set of structural parameters that enables us to find comparable structures across eight languages;
- to classify the examples in a comparable manner (add other Uralic languages to be described within the same framework);
- avoid inconsistent assignment of functions;
- **possibly find invariant meaning(s) and analyze how it is manifested in different structural positions.**

Looking for core functions

Wierzbicka's (1976) paraphrase "**I don't want more time to pass like that**" (quoted from Sawicki 2016: 81).

Šmelev (2005): "**forced speaking**"; often (impatient) call to action, and repeated requests.

Auer & Maschler (2016):

- ❖ "**prompting**" function in initiative position ("urging another participant in further developing an ongoing action (verbal or non-verbal)";

- ❖ "**go-ahead**" function in responsive position;

- ❖ marking "**next step**": "the same particle is used by the same speaker to mark their own next utterance as sequentially or topically projected <...> and hence a consequence of the preceding talk."

Method

Parameters that were initially considered to be relevant:

➢ **text type** (written vs spoken); only two languages have written corpora.

➢ **text mode** (narrative vs dialogue); fuzzy boundaries: most often, the data represents a mixture of dialogues and narratives.

➢ the **sequential position** of a discourse unit; in multiturn sequences: many turns are simultaneously reactive and initiative; one turn may consist of several discourse units.

➢ **sentence type** of the host sentence.

➢ **speech act**; assigned later.

Method: sentence types and speech acts (König & Siemund 2007)

Sentence type	Speech act
declarative	asserting, claiming, stating, accusing, criticizing, promising, guaranteeing
interrogative	asking questions, eliciting information, introducing deliberations
imperative (incl. prohibitives, optatives, hortatives)	orders, requests, suggestions, prescriptions, appeals
exclamatives	

Sentence type / stand-alone ratio

	declarative	interrogative	imperative	exclamative	stand-alone
Ingrian	84%	11%	5%	NA	NA
Beserman Udmurt	87%	6%	1.6%	0.4%	5%
Iźva Komi	84%	11%	0,5%	2%	2,5%
Selkup	71%	21%	8%	NA	NA
Livonian	93%	4%	1,5%	NA	1,5%
Seto	84%	7%	6%	NA	3%
Kamas	53%	6%	39%	1%	1%
Erzya	44%	48%	6%	NA	2%

Method

1) Declarative	2) Interrogative	3) Imperative	4) Stand-alone
Immediately adjacent to:	interrogative		
	declarative		
	imperative		
	other (event, state-of-affairs)		
Non-reactive in…	a narrative string		
	the beginning (of a dialogue, a narrative)		

Concerns about speech act theory relevance in discourse marker research

K. Aijmer (2002) *English discourse particles*:

"The study of discourse particles started out as an attempt to describe them as modifiers of speech acts."

"In speech act theory (Austin, Grice) little attention was paid to the utterance in its sequential context. However, many discourse particles are elements which cannot be understood within the boundaries of the single utterance."

Dynamic Speech Act Theory (DSAT) by M. Geis (1995)

- **Speech Act Theory** embedded in a theory of **conversational competence**.

- Speech act type often cannot be assigned to a single utterance.

- The conversational or non-conversational ("real world") **aim** must be considered.

Dynamic Speech Act Theory by M.Geis (1995)

- **Interactional structure** specifies the **goal** of the interaction.
- **Conditions** that must be met before the goal of interaction can be achieved.
- Relevant **domain information.**
- "[W]hat is important about any utterance occurring within an interaction is [...] its **transactional** and **interactional significance** – what it contributes to the specification of domain information and to the satisfaction of conditions on goal achievement."

Dynamic Speech Act Theory by M.Geis (1995)

Service encounter interaction structure:

➢ **Transactional effect**: provider commits to do A;

➢ **Initial state condition**: initiator desires provider to do A;

➢ **Satisfaction condition**: ability condition (provider is able to do A);

➢ **Domain**: action, provider, receiver, begin-time, end-time, location….

Instructed participant…

…provides feedback to the instructor that the object is identified;
…anticipates that more instruction will follow to reach the aim of
interaction.

Paukkeri (2006): "NU is used to **urge the recipient to get to the main
point**" (quoted from Bolden 2016; highlight added).

(2) Beserman Udmurt

A: Solen korž'inajaz kək gibi val.	'He had two mushrooms in his basket.'
B: *Nu*.	'**NU**.'
A: Odigze š'ote so jožiklə.	'Give one of them to the hedgehog.'
A: Kudizlə?	'Which one?'
B: Kudiz səle bakč'ajən ik so.	'The one that is in the garden.'
A: *Nu*.	'**NU**.'
B: Ləz kšeten abi dorən.	'Next to an old woman in a blue scarf.'
A: Mh.	'Uhuh.'

We argue that the function of NU as a discourse particle is connected to achieving the goal of interaction:

➢ **initiator** marks the persistence in achieving her goal;

➢ **responder** marks the cooperation in the achievement of the goal.

- Order;
- Request;
- Invitation;
- Offer;
- Question.

Occurrence of NU in adjacent utterances

(3) Beserman Udmurt

[I] *Bur palaz a punono prodavecse?*	'Shall I put the salesperson on the right?'
[A] *Ben, bur palaz.*	'Yes, on the right.'
[I] *Š'eres dore.*	'To the road.'
[A] *Nu, əžət vis kel'tə.*	'**NU**, leave a small gap.'
[I] *Nu ben, vis kel'ti əžət.*	'**NU** yes, I left a small gap.'

Order: responder's cooperation

In a narrative with embedded direct speech:

(4) Kamas:

Mǐmbiem dǐzeŋnə, mǐleʔbəʔjə:	I went to them, they give [me something]:
"Bǐdeʔ dǐ".	"Drink this!"
Nu id'iʔeʔem bǐʔpiem.	NU I drank a little bit.

Order: responder's cooperation

(5) **Standard Udmurt**

Rotnoj komand'ir praporśik komanda śotiz. «Napravl'eńije na etu trubu», — šuiz no kuź zavodskoj truba šoŗ voźmatiz. Śŗče trubaos oŗin tros. Nu, mon kopak rotajez nuiśko ińi so truba šoŗ.	The company commander gave an order. "To the direction of that pipe," he said and pointed at a long factory pipe. There are many of those pipes. NU, I bring the whole company to that pipe.

Dialogue or narrative?

If (4) and (5) are dialogues, NU can't be interpreted as "urging" or "go-ahead" > we would need to postulate a separate function.

If we treat it as the same-speaker utterance: "mark their own next utterance as sequentially or topically projected" > mark the **action** as sequentially projected

In (4) and (5), the responder (provider of the order) is being cooperative and fulfills the order.

Claimed for Russian NU that declining a request is not compatible with NU unless it is an emphatic "no" in a repeated refusal, or a following reason is provided (Šmelev 2005).

Declining an invitation: responder's cooperation

(6) Kamas

– *Amnoʔ sarɨ_su amzittə.*	'Sit down to have tea.'
– *Nu**, măn tol'ko-tol'ko amorbiam.*	**'NU**, I have just eaten.'

The transactional effect cannot be achieved (the ability condition is not fulfilled) > NU precedes the reason why it cannot be achieved > interactional effect of politeness.

Request: initiator's persistence

Narrative: the wife has a plan to kill her husband after playing cards; the husband refuses to play cards.

(7) Selkup

[The husband said: "I'm tired, it's time to sleep."]

nu dawaj, qozɨrtšɨlaj ass qutdɨn. a to onän amdan i skušnan mekga jen.

'**NU** come on, let's play cards a little. I'm sitting here alone, I'm bored.'

Request: initiator's persistence

Written, joke.

(8) Erzya

– *Vova, šumbrat! Meks a šumbrakstńat?* – *A sodan koda.* – *Nu, koda avat šumbrakstń*	'Vova, hi! Why don't you greet [me]? 'I don't know how.' '**NU**, how does your mom greet [someone]?'

A scaffold question to help achieve the transactional effect: "The child learns to greet the adult."

Offer: responder's cooperation

(9) Kamas

– *A xoš dăk miʔn'ibeʔ šide ige tospak, detlem on'iʔ. Girgit tănan deʔsittə, sire ali kömə?*	'If you want to, we have two cats, I will give you one.…Which one shall I bring you, the white one or the red one?'
– *Nu* *deʔ kömə.*	'**NU**, bring the red one.'

Request: the provider (responder) cooperates to achieve the goal (telling about weaving)

(10) Beserman Udmurt

[Interviewer_RUSS] *Nu da, nu Vy rasskažite. Mne primery prosto nužny, Vy rasskažite, vot, ja možet, prjam iz= iz Vašej reči voz'mu, potomu čto kak-to s primerami ne očen' na nix polučaetsja, jesli otdel'no.*	'Tell me. I just need examples. I will take them from what you will be saying, because giving examples somehow doesn't come out well if taken separately.'
[RA] *Ben, kəž'ə kal' tin' soje mənam verano tənəd ved'? Èto takaja mudistika vot. Kəž'ə? kak= kak že vot, kak vot daže načat' vot?* **Nu** *kuč'kiz ad'ami kuənə, ben ved'. Pukš'e so.*	'How shall I tell you? This is such a complicated stuff. How? How shall I even begin? **NU**, a person started to weave, right. S/he sits.

Question: responder's cooperation

(11) Livonian [TV = interviewer; PD = native speaker]

TV: `*mingi u'm `špits `pā̄*	'What is an oblong head like?'
PD: (.) *nu*	'**NU**' ((paper sounds, PD is drawing))

Question: initiator's right to know

(12) Livonian [AB = native speaker; TV = interviewer]

AB: *nu* `ne'i sa` `rõkānd?` (0.5) *ku* `ne mis=` *sa* `rõkāndõd?` (.) *ku* `teg siedā` (.) *tikkiž* (.) *tikkiž paņņid* (0.5) *paņņid ē* (.) `rāntõ=` *si'zzõl.* (0.5) `nodrukkõm.` (0.8) TV: *no:?* (0.5) *võib võlda ne'i* `līb.` (.) *nā̃.*	'NU so tell (0.5) if these what you say (.) if you would put this (.) all (.) all would put (0.5) would put um (.) inside the book (0.5) to publish' (0.8) 'NU (0.5) it may be it will be so (.) yes'

Question: responder provides as much information as possible

(13) Komi [MSF = interviewer, DAK: interviewee]

MSF: *A mịjen, no, vot, ti kudz viśtalannịd, torjalenị il'i oz torjalenị?* DAK: *Jaranjaşịs da ńenkajas bịdsen pańiča noolenị. Tẹdan ved, paśjasse addzịjilannịd?* *No gẹna pa-, vur'emase mal'ča moz śakej śera.*	'And how, what do you say, do they differ or they don't differ?' 'The Nenets men and women all wear panitsy. You know, have you seen fur coats? **NU** fur pa-, it's sewed as malitsa with different patterns.'

Non-interactional contexts. Narrative chain

(14) Livonian

VB: `*`nu un si'z=ē:::,* (.) *ne `baptistõd ke'itõ `immõr,* (.) *ne lekštõ kǭrandst kǭrandst `immõr. .hh* **nu** *un si'z vȯ'ļ ikš seļļi mm::: .hh `ka seļļi {vannõdi} `pȯis vȯ'ļ.* (0.8) *.hh* **nu** *un `se irgīz ē* (0.5) *.hh `vaņtõļ sīe `skūolmēstar `pǟl.* (0.5) *.hh ku vȯlks* (.) *dīezgan knaš `nai ku `võtāks. .hh hehehehe .hh* **nu** *un si'z ē* (.) *se `ka vȯ'ļ baptist `päp tegīž. .hh* (1.0) **nu** *un si'z `ne'i ni,* (0.5) ((photographing sounds in the background)) *pa'ņtõ,* (.) *`ap`pretšīztõ.* (AEDKL: F1035-01)

VB: '**NU** and then um (.) these Baptists went around (.) they went from farm [to farm] around .hh **NU** and then there was one such mm .hh also such an old bachelor (0.8) .hh **NU** and he started um (0.5) .hh to look at this teacher (0.5) .hh that [she] would be (.) quite nice wife if he would take her .hh hehehehe .hh **NU** and then um he was also a Baptist priest .hh (1.0) **NU** and then so now (0.5) ((photographing sounds in the background)) they (.) got married'

Non-interactional contexts. Rhetorical questions

A blogger writing about somebody who successfully sold souvenirs with inscriptions in Erzya and Moksha:

(15) Erzya
Nu, koda jutams sinst vaksska?
'**NU**, how can one pass by them (without buying anything)?'

Non-interactional context. Exclamatives

Written media. The interviewee [B] mentions an old name of a profession *"konogon"* (a horse manager in a mine). The interviewer [A] doesn't know this word.

(16) Standard Udmurt

A: *Dugde aj, ma so «konogon» šuem?*	'Wait a bit, what is "konogon"?'
- Todmotem ķil pumļśen pajmļsa juaśko.	'I ask surprised getting across an unknown word.'
B: *Nu ta jegitjoşjn! Konogon - so val ul'l'aś.*	'**NU** these young people! Konogon is a horse manager.'

Non-interactional context. Tautologies

The speaker talks about a job where she had to walk across town early in the morning. One morning she was left behind by the group of women that used to walk with her. She doesn't dare to go alone.

(17) Seto

a ma ei julge (…) no ei `julge ja ei= l'ää ei= l'ää ja kyik'

'but I don't dare (…) NU [I] don't dare and I won't go I won't go and that's   it'

Conclusions

- ➤ NU as a discourse marker has the core meaning of cooperating in moving towards a goal.

- ➤ It is manifested differently depending on the role of the participant of a situation (initiator vs responder).

- ➤ "Go ahead" interpretation arises only in cases where the transactional effect is not achieved (domain specification, satisfaction condition specification).

- ➤ Non-interactional contexts (exclamatives, rhetorical questions, and tautologies) are not analyzed within DSAT.

References

Aijmer, K. (2002). *English Discourse Particles. Evidence from a Corpus*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Auer, P., & Maschler, Y. (2016). The family of NU and NÅ across the languages of Europe and beyond: Structure, function, and history. *NU/NÅ: A family of discourse markers across the languages of Europe and beyond*, edited by Peter Auer and Yael Maschler. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1-47.

Auer, P., & Maschler, Y. (Eds.). (2016*). NU/NÅ: A family of discourse markers across the languages of Europe and beyond* (Vol. 58). Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG.

Bolden, G. B. (2016). The discourse marker nu in Russian conversation. *NU and NÅ: A Family of Discourse Markers across Languages of Europe and Beyond*, edited by Peter Auer and Yael Maschler. Berlin: De Gruyter, 48-80.

Geis, M. L. (1995). *Speech Acts and Conversational Interaction*. Cambridge University Press.

Keevallik, L. (2016). Estonian no(o)(h) in turns and sequences: families of function. *NU/NÅ: A family of discourse markers across the languages of Europe and beyond*, edited by Peter Auer and Yael Maschler. Berlin: De Gruyter, 213-242.

Kuosmanen, A., & Multisilta, T. (1999). Nu and vot in Spoken Russian On discourse functions and prosodic features. *Scando-Slavica*, 45(1), 49-64.

König, E., & Siemund, P. (2007). Speech act distinctions in grammar. *Language typology and syntactic description*, 1, 276-324.

Paukkeri, P. (2006). *Recipient v russkom razgovore: o raspredelenii funkcij mezhdu otvetami Da, Nu i Tak* [Recipient in Russian Conversation: On the Distribution of Functions between Responces Da, Nu and Tak]. Helsinki: Helsinki University.

Sawicki, L. (2016). The Polish multifunctional particle no. *NU/NÅ: Family of Discourse Markers Across the Languages of Europe and Beyond*, edited by Peter Auer and Yael Maschler. Berlin: De Gruyter, 81-103.

Sorjonen, M. L., & Vepsäläinen, H. (2016). The Finnish particle no. *NU/NÅ: A Family of Discourse Markers Across the Languages of Europe and Beyond*. Edited by Peter Auer and Yael Maschler. Berlin: De Gruyter, 243-80.

Šmelev A. D. (2005). Pokazateli xezitacii v russkoj ustnoj reči. *Jazyk, Ličnost', Tekst,* edited by V. N. Toporov. Moskva: Jazyki slavjanskix kul'tur, 518-530.

Wierzbicka, A. (1976). Particles and linguistic relativity. *International Review of Slavic Linguistics*, 1(2-3), 327-367.