

# Sentence-initial particles in Udmurt

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Soome-ugri keelte ja murrete sügissümposion, EKI

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# Introduction

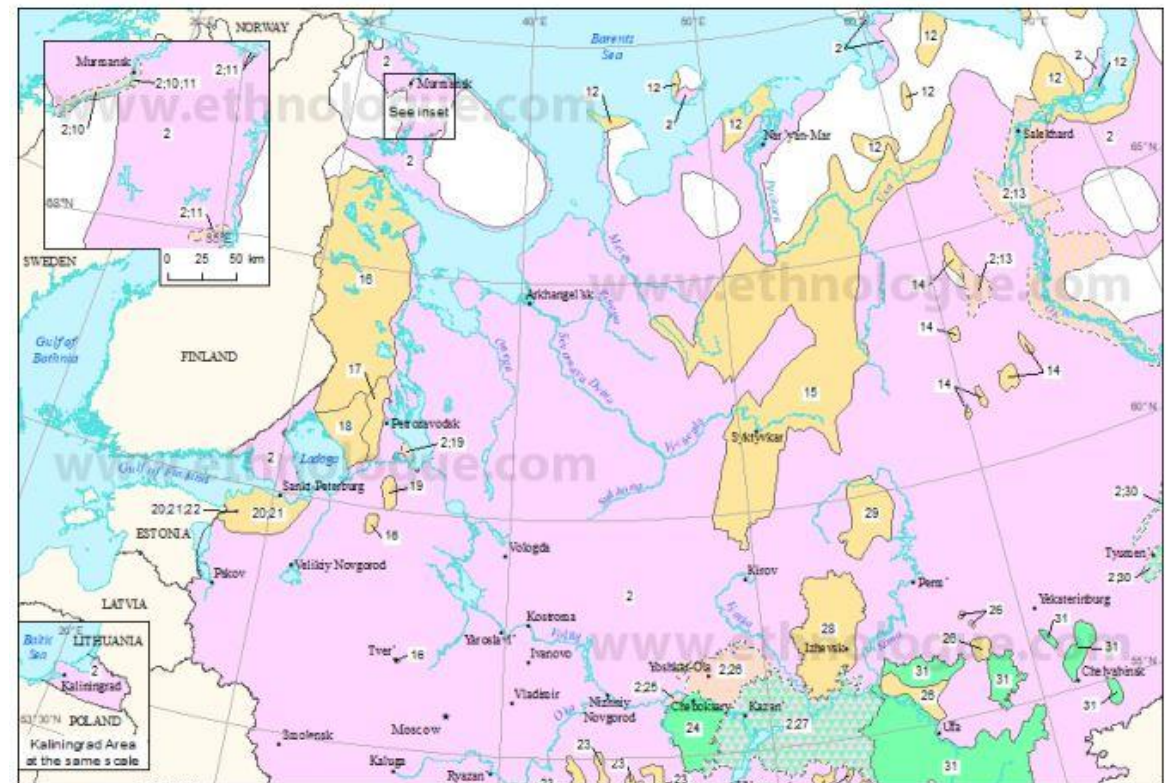
- Udmurt < Permic < Uralic
- Number of native speakers:  
**Approx. 300 000**
- In Estonia: **62** native speakers (2021)  
(*Statistics Estonia: Statistical database*)
- Main contact languages:

## Russian, Tatar

- Head-final language changing to head initial (Asztalos 2018)
- Relatively free word order; discontinuous syntactic expressions are attested.

## Western Russian Federation

See language listings for [Russian Federation](#)



[http://www.ethnologue.com/map/RU\\_w](http://www.ethnologue.com/map/RU_w)

Syntactic position	Modal/discourse particles	Focus particles	Response interjections	Conjunction
Right periphery (RP)	<i>no</i> <i>gine</i> <i>ńi</i> <i>na</i>	<i>no</i> 'too, even' <i>gine</i> 'only' <i>ńi</i> 'already', <i>na</i> 'yet'		no 'and'
	<i>meda, -o</i> (in questions)			
	<i>ik</i> 'after all', 'even'			
	<i>uk</i> 'after all'			
Left periphery (LP) (mostly sentence-initial) or Right periphery	<i>aj</i>			
	<i>šat</i>			
	<i>ved'</i> 'after all'			
	<i>dak</i>			
	<i>ben (bon)</i>		ben (bon) 'yes'	
Left periphery (mostly sentence-initial)	<i>ja</i> 'well'		ja 'okay'	ja
	<i>nu</i> 'well'		nu	
	<i>ma</i> 'well'			

# Corpus frequencies

	<b>Udmurt Corpora Press (8 730 662)</b>	<b>Udmurt Corpora Blogs (491 000)</b>	<b>Spoken Beserman dialogues (188 020)</b>	<b>Spoken Beserman monologues (53 372)</b>
<i>Nu</i> - no.(wpt)	441 (0.05)	550 (1.12)	1184 (6.3)	69 (6.3)
<i>Ja</i> - no.(wpt)	480 (0.06)	192 (0.39)	792 (4.2)	47 (0.9)
<i>Ma</i> - no.(wpt)	3027 (0.35)	230 (0.47)	833 (4.43)	78 (1.46)

(1) [The narrator is confused why the traffic light does not turn green. Then she sees other people waiting too.]

*Nu, malpa-ško, jaram, šońer sıl-iško, đır.*  
PTCL think-PRS.1SG okay right stand-PRS.1SG probably

‘NU(well/so) I think okay, I’m doing right to stand, probably’.

(Main Udmurt corpus)

(2) [A young couple is saying fairwell to each other. The man says:]

*Ja, L'enuk-e, šures vij-e pot-jnj dir vu-i-z*  
PTCL PN-P1SG road top-LAT come.out-INF time come-PST-3SG

*iñi.*

already

‘JA(well, so) my dear Lena, it’s time to get going”.

(Main Udmurt corpus)

(3) (Main Udmurt corpus)

*Todiškodj-a Gord plośad'jś  
mavzol'ej śarjś?*

***Ma**, todiško kad'.*

*Kin ben otjn kij'l'e?*

*Pëtr Pervjj, pe.*

'Do you know about the  
Mausoleum at the Red Square?'

'Well, I kind of know'

'Who is lying there?'

'Probably Peter the Great'.

# Typological perspective

- ‘WELL’ pragmatic markers are attested in different languages.
- Can derive from terms with the meaning ‘good’: Eng. *well*, French *bon*, Chinese *hao* (Beeching&Wang 2014). They are typically left-peripheral response markers.
- Politeness-induces semantic change (Beeching&Wang 2014):
- Pragmaticalization

‘good’ > ‘less than good’ > pause fillers, modal particles

LP response item > LP response item > Medial position



# Typological perspective

- Politeness-induces semantic change (Beeching&Wang 2014):
- Pragmaticalization path:

'good' > 'less than good' > pause fillers, modal particles

Dialogual usage	>	"Monologal dialogic" usage
Expressive reaction to a previous speaker's words:		"Speakers nuance their opinions by rhetorically exploiting a dialogual style" (ibid.: 55-56)
<i>Acceptance</i>		<i>Rhetorical questions</i>
<i>Surprise</i>		<i>Exclamations</i>
<i>Refuting</i>		<i>Marking successive stages in a narrative</i>
<i>Providing backchannel</i>		<i>Hesitation marker, pause filler</i>

# Semantic map for *well*, *bon*, and *hao* (Beeching & Wang 2014)

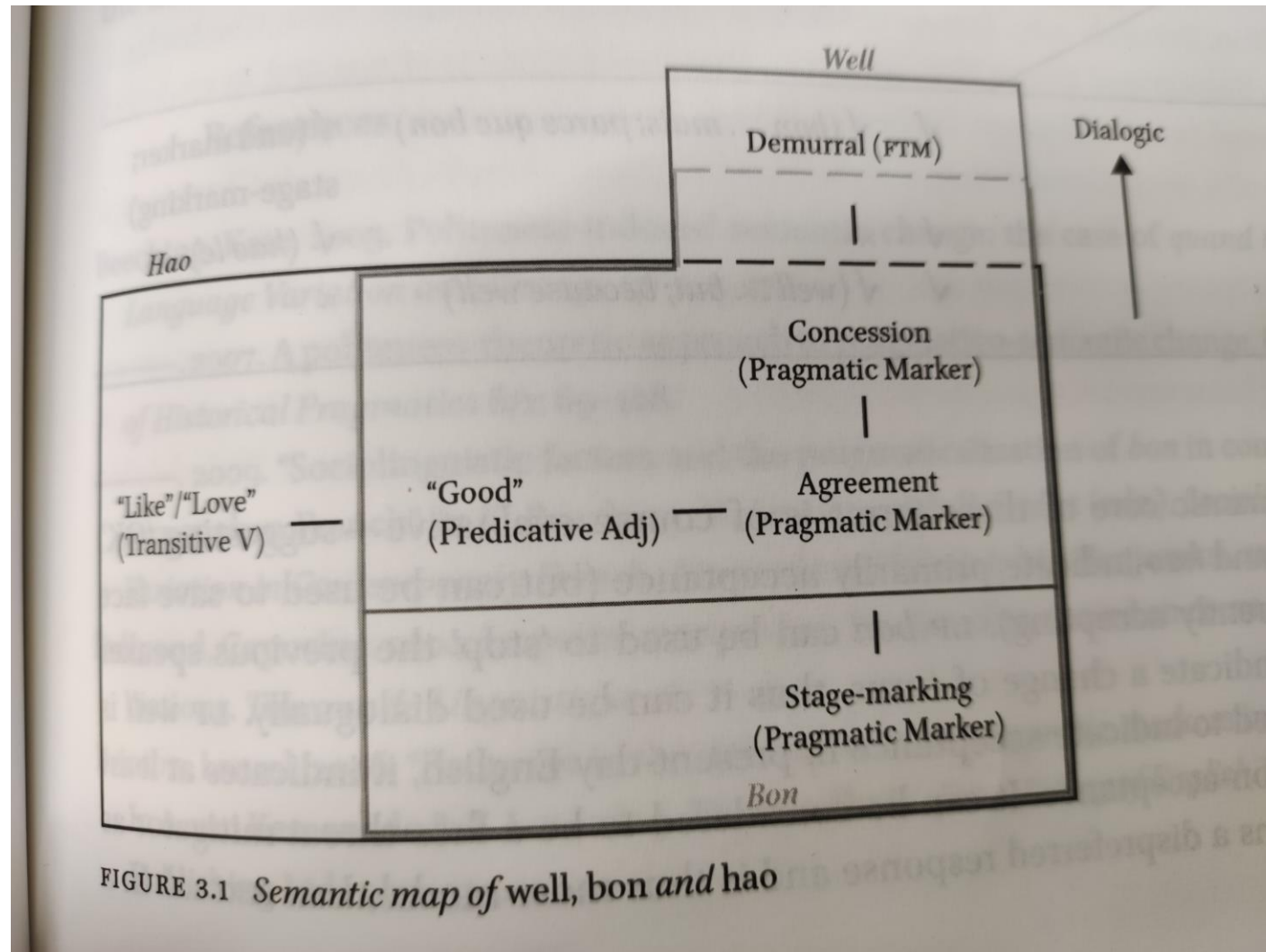


FIGURE 3.1 *Semantic map of well, bon and hao*

# Aims

- Provide a comparative descriptions of the three Udmurt particles NU, JA, MA.
- Map the synchronic usage of the particles on the scale.

‘good’ > ‘less than good’ > pause fillers, modal particles

# Origin

- *nu* < Rus. *nu* (< protoE \**nu* ‘now’).

However, *no* ‘and’ < \**nǝ* (demonstrative pronoun) (Majtinskaya 2010: 94).

- *ja* <?Turkic *ja*

Udmurt conjunction *ja* < Turkic conj. *ja* < ?Pers. (Tarakanov 1975: 184–185)

- *ma* <?Udmurt *ma(r)* ‘what’

# *Ja* in other Uralic languages\*

## Selkup

(The people start to catch fish.)

«**Ja**, *namyššak soma qum Markyn ča!*», – *tomnə:tyn qumyn.*

‘“Well, what a good man Markyncha is!” — the people said.’

## Erzya

(The snow fell. As if, the person wearing a white coat came and sat onto the spring.)

**Я**, *юты чи-кавто, ванат, кадовить кельме шубадонзо ды ваньксчидензэ ансяк панкст.*

‘Well, a day or two passes by, only rags remain of her cold coat and cleanness.’

\*Examples are kindly provided by Denys Teptiuk.

# Tatar interjection *я, ягез* /jə, jəgez/

- To ask, request, invite, urge someone to carry out (or not to carry out) an action.
- To ask, urge the interlocutor to continue to speak, or to hurry him for an answer to a question.
- In an interrogative sentence, to indicate disagreement, disapproval, while at the same time reproaching the interlocutor, or making him feel ashamed.
- With the interrogative suffix *-me* joined to *я*, to ask the interlocutor's consent to carry out an action and to simultaneously indicate one's promise to do so.

(Burbiel 2018: 453-454)

# Response interjection: *ja* in Udmurt Corpus (approx. 5%)

(4) (Main Udmurt corpus)

*Ľidž-j, - šu-iško.*

read-IMP.SG say-PRS.1SG

‘Read! – I say.’

**-Ja,** - *pe.*

PTCL CIT

‘Okay, - s/he says.’

# Response interjection: *ja* in spoken Beserman corpus, subcorpus of dialogues (96%)

(5) Beserman corpus

[A] *Soos dorən jožik wan'. Otč'a. Punid a?*

[S] *Ja.*

[A] *I kwin'met'i nəl murtlaš' gord kašeten, gord ja= gord jərč'ijen.*

[S] *Səre.*

[A] *Gibize baš'tə, tože jožik vələz pun. Punid a?*

[S] *Ja.*

[A] *Bakč'a ulla palan wan' kwin' pin'al'l'os.*

[S] *Səre.*

[AP] 'There's a hedgehog next to it. There. Have you put it there?'

[SN] 'Okay.'

[AP] 'And from the third girl with a red scarf, red h= with red hair.'

[SN] 'Go on.' [lit. 'then']

[AP] 'Take the mushrooms, put those on the hedgehog too. Have you put?'

[SN] 'Okay.'

[AP] 'Below the garden, there are three kids.'

[SN] 'Go on'.

- 79% make up a response utterance on its own.
- 17% are complex markers: *ja ladno* [RUS], *ladno ja* 'okay', *ja sre* 'go on', *ja ka* [RUS] 'go on', *ben ja* 'okay'.



# Response interjection: *nu*

*Main Udmurt corpus (0,33%); Spoken Beserman (5%)*

## (7) Beserman corpus (experiment)

A: *Solen korž'inajaz kək gibi val.*

B: **Nu.**

A: *Odigze š'ote so jožiklə.*

A: *Kudizlə?*

B: *Kudiz səle bakč'ajən ik so.*

A: **Nu.**

B: *Ləz kšeten abi dorən.*

A: *Mh.*

A: He had two mushrooms in his basket.

B: **NU.**

A: Give one of them to the hedgehog.

B: Which one?

A: The one that is in the garden.

B: **NU**

A: Next to an old woman in a blue scarf.

B: Uhuh.

# Response interjection: *ma*

- Not attested

# Concession: *'It's good at least ...'* (Main Udmurt corpus)

- *ja kot'* 28 occurrences (4.8%)

(8)

*Ja kot', tau Inmar-lj...*

PTCL at.least thank god-DAT

*T'fu! T'fu! T'fu! Viśon ortč-i-z, leśa.*

INTJ INTJ INTJ disease pass-PST-3SG seem

'It's good at least, thanks God, [spits three times], that the disease has gone, it seems.'

(Main Udmurt corpus)

Concession: *'It's good at least ...'*  
(Main Udmurt corpus)

*Nu kot'* (1 occurrence)

*Ma kot'* (3 occurrences).

(9) ('I ask in Udmurt, they explain to me in Russian')

«*Nu kot' ožj!*» - *šuiško iñi as ponnam.*

PTCL at.least so

'Well, at least this way.' – I say to myself.

(Main Udmurt corpus)

# Contradicting response

*Nu*: rare but possible

(10) Beserman Udmurt

[S] *Evəl a, ožojez gužam n'i?*

[P] *Мы не употребляем такие слова.*

[S] **Nu** *veraš'kom kəž'əke, [PN].*

[P] *Давай дальше.*

[S] Can't we say "the grass has turned yellow?"

[P][RUS] We don't say such words.

[S] NU we do say somehow, [PN].

[P] [RUS] go on

# Contradicting response

*Ma*: 6% of spoken Beserman examples

(11) Beserman Udmurt

[L] *A dən ke evəl, soos kulo a?*

[L] If it's not clean, they [the bees] will die?

[R] ***Ma*** *ug kulo no, no n'eprijatno.*

[R] Well no, they won't, but it's unpleasant.

# Contradicting response

- *Ja* – not attested

# Providing additional information: *ma*, *nu* vs *ja*

(12) Written Udmurt: 17.7% occurrences of *ma* together with an additive marker.

*Todiško na, ogare kolorad bečj 10 gektar  
kartošmes śijsa bjdtiz,*

*soku soin ros-pros nŭrjaškon amaljos ej  
val na,*

***ma**, agronome **no** pinal val, maze-soze  
valasa ež vuttj, djr.*

I remember yet, there was one year  
when the potato beetle destroyed 10  
hectars of potato,

Back then, there were yet no effective  
methods against it,

Also, the agronomist was still young, he  
probably did not understand things.



# Question-answer pair: dispreferred answer

(13) Elicited

*Nu/ ma/ ja ton mjin-iško-d-a?*

ptcl ptcl ptcl you go-prs-2sg-q

‘So are you coming?’

*Nu/ ma/ ?ja mjin-iško.*

‘ptcl ptcl ptcl go-prs.1sg

‘Well, I’m coming.’

# Modal usages: NU & MA vs JA in exclamatives

NU: 17% of sentences with *nu* are degree exclamatives.

(14) Elicited (adapted from main Udmurt corpus)

*Nu/ Ma/ \*Ja ta jegit-jos-jn!*  
PTCL/ PTCL/ PTCL DEM young-PL-INS

‘Oh these young people!’

(15) *Soin, leśa, karttek no tugantek uliś kjšnoosmj jęno pios kotjrjn nu! bergalo uk.*

‘That’s probably the reason why our women who live without a husband or a boyfriend **NU** spin (=spin so much) around handsome guys!’

# Modal usages: NU & MA vs JA in rhetorical questions

(16) Elicited

*Ma /Nu / \*Ja kǝ́ǝ́ oǝ́ǝ́?!*

PTCL PTCL PTCL how so

‘(But) how so?!’

Ma: 8%

Nu: 7%

Ja: ?

Modal usages: NU vs MA & JA to signal  
hesitation

# Summary of the results

	Positive response interjection	Go-ahead response	“Urging” the interlocutor to do smth.	Concession	Additional information	Dispreferred answer	Contradictory answer	Modal usage (excalatives & rhetorical questions)	Marking hezitation
<i>Nu</i>	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	++	++
<i>Ma</i>	NA	NA	+	+	++	+	++	+	NA
<i>Ja</i>	++	++	+	++	NA (*)	NA(*)	NA	?	NA

# Tay!

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# Java, jate, ?jatele

(6) Elicited

<i>Kirž̑a,</i>	<i>ja-va/</i>	<i>ja-te/</i>	<i>*ja-te-le?</i>
sing-IMP.SG	PTCL-Q	PTCL-Q	PTCL-Q-PL

‘Sing, okay?’



Мащ'инщ'а со... щ'ас верало... {{ma}} со prazn'ik sáč'e ik со мащ'инщ'а.

Масленица -- это, щас скажу, ну, это праздник такой же, масленица.

# Я кызьы 1 occurrence

Со - бе-ге-

мот! Голубков (пуксе, жёк вылэ гырпумъяськыса, йыр бордаз кырм  
иське). **Я кызьы** тазьы лекцилы дасяськод? Йырын ваньмыз силос г  
уын кадь сураськиз ни: бегемот-обормот, атайбатай...

Голубков (садится, упираясь на стол локтем, за голову хватается). Ну  
как так к лекции подготовиться? В голове, как в силосной яме, все  
смешалось уже...

Ну, ма, да, бен. ?Я

# Ну кызьы 22 occurrences

Та бөрсьы как сёто кырзан:

«Пинал пиез туган кутй, со но армие кошкиз...» **Ну кызьы** озьы? Мо  
н понна со валантэм.

- Отчы ваем вальёслы туж паймизы учёнойёс, спортсменъёс, журналістъёс. **Ма** кызьы, пе, уз? Ышем выжы шуак син азязы потйз ук.
- Привезенным туда лошадям очень удивились учёные, спортсмены, журналисты. Ну как, мол, нет (не удивиться)? Ведь пропавшая порода резко перед их глазами появилась.

# МА по

- {{Ma}}, Ну, Бен, Дак, Да \*Я собере, спортсменъёс но луло адямиос ук: я висыны усё, я экзаменъёс сёто.
- Да, и потом спортсмены ведь тоже живые люди: то болеть начинают, то экзамены сдают.

# *Ja* in spoken Beserman corpus

- [VM] ... olokəž'ə, n'əmze vuneti uk. **Ja**, ladno.  
[RA] **Ja** ka vspomnit' kar, **java**?  
[VM] **Ja, ja**.
- [VM] не знаю, забыл, как называется. Ну ладно.  
[RA] Ну-ка вспомни-ка, ладно?  
[VM] Ладно, ладно.