

Permic ‘if’-based particles

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Particles in Udmurt and Komi present two riddles that seemingly do not have much in common. First, Udmurt has a particle *iske* ‘then, in that case’, which is widely assumed to be a Chuvash borrowing (< Modern Chuvash *eke*, earlier *æke*), e.g. by Fedotov (1968: 102). The peculiar thing about this particle is that there are absurdly many similar particles in both the standard language and the dialects that are believed to be its variants. There are at least *oske*, *uske*, *ozke* and *äske*, as well as their shortened or metathetic variants *sike*, *ske* and *ske*. There is no known regular phonological correspondence between the dialects that could have accounted for this multitude. Second, Komi has a particle *eske*. It is claimed by the grammars to be a conditional particle equivalent to the Russian *bi*. However Tillinger (2022) points out that, unlike *bi*, it is compatible with any tense forms and curiously tends to appear in the apodosis of conditional sentences, but not in the protasis.

I claim that both particles are actually grammaticalized adjunct clauses that involve a conditional conjunction (*ke* in Udmurt, *ke* in Komi) cliticized to a predicate. The Udmurt particles are most probably based on different predicates, which explains their number. The Komi particle might be a phonologically reduced form of *esiž=ke* ‘if it is so / that way’, yielding the sense ‘then, in that case’ naturally compatible with an apodosis, but not protasis.

Both Udmurt and Komi have optional pro-drop, do not need any auxiliaries with non-verbal predicates in the affirmative present, and have enclitic conditional conjunctions. Therefore, a clause ‘if it is P’ can be packed into one phonological word, which facilitates its grammaticalization. In Komi, a number of words are historically based on this construction: *sižke* / *sičke* ‘then; in that case’ < *siž=ke* ‘if it is so’, *gaške* ‘maybe’ < *gaž=ke* wish=if ‘if there is wish / if you wish’, *burake* ‘probably; it seems’ < *bura=ke* well=if ‘if it is good’ (Serebrennikov 1963: 382). The Udmurt *oske* ‘then, in that case’ appears in early newspapers, where it is often spelled as *ozke* and is straightforwardly derived from *ož=ke* ‘if it is so’ (*ož* being a widespread variant of the standard *oži* ‘so, that way’). It is very probable that *iske* is based on another, now non-existent proximal demonstrative **iž* ‘so, this way’. A crucial piece of evidence is provided by Munkácsi (1887: 59), who actually was the first to propose this hypothesis for *iske*. He attested *iske* with the stress on the first syllable, as would be expected of a combination with the conditional *ke*.

Uske, *özke* and *äske* most probably come from combinations of the 3SG negative verbs in FUT (*uz=ke*) or PST (*öz=ke* / *ez=ke*, depending on the dialect), with an elided connegative of a lexical verb. This is compatible with the fact that the verb in the apodosis of a conditional may be FUT-marked or PST-marked in Udmurt. Compositional combinations like that are available in contemporary Udmurt. Besides, even though Kirillova (2008) claims *uske* to be synonymous with *iske*, a usage example under a different headword, *kutjnĭ* ‘catch’, contains this word in the sense ‘otherwise; if not’, which can be expected of a combination with a negative verb.

Chuvash origin of the Udmurt *iske* can be ruled out independently of the aforementioned considerations because of a semantic mismatch. Descriptions, Russian translations and usage examples of its potential source, *(ə)εke* (Ashmarin 1937: 115-116; Fedotov 1963: 65-66), make clear that it is semantically a pretty typical enimitive particle, in terms of Panov (2020).

While individual etymologies for each of these particles may require another look, it is clear that we are dealing with a closely-knit family of particles grown out of a conditional construction. The proposed historical source for these particles explains their properties and may shed some light on the diachronic development of Permic languages.

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