

## **A diachronic perspective on the discursive functions of the Mari 3SG possessive suffix**

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Several Uralic languages employ possessive suffixes in functions related to discourse organization, including the marking of identifiability, contrast, or topic shift (e.g. Nikolaeva 2003, Gerland 2014, Simonenko 2014). The origin of these discursive functions of Uralic possessive suffixes has received internal explanations (Fraurud 2001, Kiss & Tánčzos 2018), but some studies have also suggested language contact as factor in the development of the possessive suffixes' functions in individual Uralic languages (e.g. Serebrennikov 1972: 10, Leinonen 1998: 75, Nikolaeva 2003: 140–142).

Across these studies, the data comes from different sources such as 21st century spoken or written corpus data, 21st century elicited data, or from secondary literature with data from various older sources. But so far, no study about possessive suffixes has systematically investigated the diachronic development of their discursive functions within a single language (an exception being Halm 2018 on Hungarian). This is a gap in the study of the grammaticalization or contact history of possessive suffixes in any language, and Uralic in general.

This talk addresses this issue by investigating the discursive functions of the Mari 3SG possessive suffix in a sample of early 20th century Mari oral texts representing its dialectal sub-groups, and comparing them to the possessive suffix's functions in 21st century oral texts (Volkova et al. 2024). There is an abundance of recorded dialectal oral texts of early 20th century Mari (Bradley 2016: 119–129) which makes it possible to conduct such a dialectologically informed study.

I show that the Mari varieties of the 20th century exhibit variation with respect to the frequency and the functions of the 3SG possessive suffix, including, for example, a higher share of partitive-like contrastive examples in the eastern varieties, the existence of anaphoric marking in Meadow Mari varieties – which is hardly reflected in studies investigating contemporary Mari (e.g. Simonenko 2014) – and an increase in functions resembling the Russian discourse particle *zhe* in 21st century texts.

Thus, this historical corpus-based study of different varieties allows to uncover diatopic and diachronic microvariation of the possessive suffix's functions within Mari, to subsequently draw conclusions about its internal reconstruction in Mari, and to detect possible contact influence from its most important contact languages Chuvash, Tatar, and Russian. In sum, the study contributes to understanding the development of the discursive functions of the 3SG possessive suffix in Mari, and in the larger context, of this phenomenon in Uralic.

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