

Expression of partitivity in the quantifier phrases of Mordvinic languages

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Erzya and Moksha (Mordvinic branch, Uralic) possess a complex nominal declension system comprising of an extensive case system and three declension paradigms (basic, definite, and possessive). In quantifier constructions, the case and number marking of the nouns vary. Two strategies can be pointed out: nominative and separative (see e.g. Alhoniemi 1992; Bartens 1999; Rueter, in preparation). In the nominative strategy, the noun does not bear any case marking, whereas in the separative strategy it can be either in the ablative case, which local function is marginal in the modern languages, or the elative case (in Erzya only).

In this talk, we focus on the case variation attested in the nouns when they occur with the quantifiers *E lamo*, *M lama* ‘many, much, a lot’ and *E alamo*, *M kərža* ‘a little, a few’. Our material is derived from the MokshEr corpus,¹ which consists of belletristic texts and journal articles in the modern literary languages and comprises a data sample of 1200 examples (300 exx. per quantifier). In the sample, we observe quantifiers in three construction types: (i) adnominal modifier constructions, (ii) partitive constructions, in which the quantifier expresses the subset and the noun superset and (iii) quantifier predication, in which the quantifier functions as a nominal predicate.

Our results show that case variation of the noun depends on the function of the quantifier in both languages, although they show a different distribution of strategies. The case variation is greater in Moksha than in Erzya, since the separative strategy is attested in all quantifier constructions therein. The case of the noun in the Moksha modifier constructions varies without apparent reasons (1), and both strategies are attested equally frequently. In other constructions, the ablative case is used, cf. (2).

Moksha

(1) adnominal modification

a. *Kattakurgan-ca lama mokša-da i erža-da.*

Kattakurgan-INE many Moksha-ABL and Erzya-ABL

‘In Kattakurgan, there are many Mokshas and Erzyas.’ (MokshEr: A527)

b. *Ńäj-f, lama veř šud'-i.*

see-PTCP much blood flow-PRS.3SG

‘See, a lot of blood flows.’ (MokshEr: A979)

(2) quantifier predication

Kurenda-k, aškət-t, mahorka-da lama!

smoke-IMP.2SG roll-IMP.2SG strong.tobacco-ABL much

‘Smoke it, roll it, there is a lot of tobacco (lit. of strong tobacco is much).’ (MokshEr: A870)

In Erzya, the use of the separative strategy is restricted to partitive and quantifier predication constructions, cf. (3). In adnominal modifier constructions, the nominative case is the only option, unless the syntactic function of the noun requires another case marking (Alhoniemi 1982: 7, 10).

(3) Erzya, quantifier predication

Íst'a-t bakt'erija-t'ńe-d'e pek lamo

like.this-PL bacterium-PL.DEF-ABL very many

‘Such bacteria are quite numerous.’ (MokshEr: A1644)

The difference in the distribution of the strategies influences the overall marking of the noun. In Erzya, the separative strategy attested in the partitive and quantifier predication constructions correlates with the definite plural marking, cf. (3). In contrast, Moksha separative strategy attested in all quantifier constructions occurs in basic declension, where number distinction cannot be made. Only in partitive constructions, Moksha behaves the same way as Erzya and adheres to the definite declension plural marking, as in (4). Partitive constructions are thus organized in a similar way in both languages.

(4) Moksha, partitive construction

Lamə-t'-ńə mokšə-t'-ńə-ń i eřza-t'-ńə-ń ez-da

many-PL-DEF Moksha-PL-DEF-GEN and Erzya-PL-DEF-GEN PP-ABL

jak-še-L'-t' kal-s.

go-FRQ-PST2-3PL fish-ILL

‘And many of the Mokshas and Erzyas had been going fishing.’ (MokshEr: A1056)

The differences in the behavior of number and definiteness markers in the separative strategy can be interpreted in the following way. In Moksha, the separative strategy, apparently initially used in the partitive construction, spread first to quantifier predication, and from this use further started occurring with quantifiers that function as adnominal modifiers. This development path seems plausible, especially since in Moksha definiteness marking is not obligatory in oblique cases. A similar development has already taken place in less distantly related Finnic languages where a partitive case functions in a similar vein (see e.g. Hakulinen et al. 2004 § 1234 for Finnish). In contrast, Erzya conventionalizes the separative strategy only in specific environments where the partitive reading can occur either in the partitive construction, or with partial subjects in the quantifier predicate constructions.

References

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