"If you say why": Causal clauses under contact pressure in Mari and Udmurt

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With the exception of Russian (a SVO language), the languages of the Middle Volga Region of European Russia have SOV as the pragmatically unmarked word order (cf. Vilkuna 2010: 178; Johanson 2021: 34), be they Turkic languages (Tatar, Bashkir, Chuvash) or Uralic languages (Mari, Udmurt). As typological knowledge implies, this not only governs the placement of nominal objects, but also the conventional placement and structuring of different types of subordinate clauses. Subordination in these languages makes broad use of non-finite rather than finite verbal forms, in line with general trend within Eurasia that the usage of non-finite verbal forms increases the further East one moves (cf. Shagal et al. under review). Examples (1) and (2) illustrate the discrepancy between Russian and Mari in the marking of causality, with Russian introducing the finite causal clause with the conjunction *potomu čto*, but Mari (as recorded in 1900) using an embedded participle (serving as a verbal noun), marked with the dative (that conventionally indicates causal and purpose relations in the languages of the Middle Volga Region, cf. Bereczki 1984: 308–309) that precedes the finite verb.

(1) Russian, 2024 (elicited)

ja	*jejo*	*l'ubl'u,*	*potomu čto*	*ona*	*meńa*	*l'ubit*
1SG.NOM	3SG.F.ACC	love.1SG	because	3SG.F.NOM	1SG.ACC	love.3SG

'I love her because she loves me.'

(2) Eastern Mari, 1900 (Paasonen & Siro 1939: 176–177)

mǝń	*ojgᵊr-m-em-lạn*	*iδạ*	*ojγǝrọ,* [...]
1SG	grieve-PTCP.PASS-POSS.1SG-DAT	NEG.IMP.2PL	grieve.CNG

'Trauert nicht darum, weil ich traure, [...]'

At first glance, this discrepancy seems weaker when examining modern language, both literary and colloquial: In Mari and Udmurt, Russian-type causal clauses are encountered, using the conjunction borrowed from Russian (3) – especially starting with the Stalinist purges of the late 1930s and the increased orientation on Russian in language policy and literacy, with indigenous literacies violently interrupted and replaced with a focus on translations from Russian advocating Muscovite politics. The first occurrence of a borrowed Russian conjunction in Mari in the corpus is from 1933 (also one Eastern Mari occurrence *potomū-tʃto* in Lewy 1926: 50).

(3) Mari, 1939 (Corpus of Literary Mari, corpus.mari-language.com)

Jogor	*kum-ǝm*	*mǝj*	*ńigunam om*	*βurso,*	*potomušto*	*tudo*	*saj*	*ajdeme*
Yogor	godfather-ACC	1SG	never NEG.1SG	scold.CNG	because	3SG	good	person

'I never scold godfather Yogor because he's a good person…'

Furthermore, parentheticals, seemingly originating in a bridging linkage strategy, are increasingly encountered starting around the same time: Mari *molan man-aš gǝn* why say-INF

if 'because (lit. if one say why)', Udmurt *maļị ke šu-ono* why if say-PTCP.NECC 'because (lit. if one must say why)'. In Mari, this structure with a varying person-marked form can be encountered already in folklore texts (first example known to me in a song from 1908–1913, *molan man-ə̂δa γə̂n* why say-2PL if 'wenn ihr [sagt] wofür', Saarinen 1994: 186) and in the earliest text in the corpus (from 1916); starting in the 1930s (first example from 1933) increasingly ossified with (eventually exclusively) the infinitive. In modern language this parenthetical, in Mari as in Udmurt, is frequently encountered in clauses where Russian would (or in the case of translation, does) use *potomu čto* (4).

(4) Udmurt, 2014 (Mark 7:20, finugorbib.com/bible/udmurt/41_Mar07_na.html)

maļị	*ke*	*šu-ono*	*pušk-ịš,*	*ad'ami*	*śulem-ịš*	*pot-o*
why	if	say-PTCP.NEC	inside-ELA	person	heart-ELA	come-3PL

urod-eś—l'ek-eś	*malpan-jos*
bad-PL—wicked-PL	thought-PL

'For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts […]' (in New Russian Translation: […] *Potomu čto iznutri* […])

While the basic mechanisms are self-evident, the exact manner by which these structural changes occurred and their distribution in the contemporary languages has to date not been adequately illustrated. This talk will use corpus infrastructures for the languages published in recent years, most notably the Corpus of Literary Mari (corpus.mari-language.com) with its time spread of over a century as well as Timofey Arkhangelskiy's corpora of Mari and Udmurt literary language and social media (udmurt.web-corpora.net, meadow-mari.web-corpora.net) as tools to study the diachrony and sociolinguist distribution of different methods of denoting causal clauses, especially through the lens of publication/translation policies during and after the Stalinist era, and differences between different genres in contemporary usage.

Non-Leipzig glossing abbreviations

CNG	connegative
ELA	elative
NEC	necessitive

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