Nominal causal constructions in Erzya

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The presentation is devoted to the distribution of forms, overtly marking the cause within nominal constructions in the Erzya language. The study is based on my own field data remotely collected in 2023 from three native Erzya speakers.

There are two common strategies to encode cause within a nominal construction in Erzya: using (i) cases (ablative and elative) or (ii) postpositions, both specialized and non-specialised.

i. Cases, encoding causativity in Erzya

The principal causal marker remains ablative. It bears no restrictions on dependent words and is employed with nouns, both definite and indefinite, pronouns and nominalizations. It is also compatible with different semantic types of cause and may appear in various contexts, see (1) and (2), representing negative and positive evaluation of consequences respectively.

(1) tsyora-s'   kulo-s'   vachochi-**de**[1]
    man-NOM.DEF die-PST.3SG   hunger-ABL

    'The man died of starvation.'

(2) eykaksho-s'   raka-zev-s'   keniardo-ma-**dont'**
    child- NOM.DEF   laugh-INCH-PST.3SG   joy-NMLZ-ABL.DEF

    'The child laughed of joy.'

In general, ablative case is the most frequent causal marker used in noun phrases[2]. However, in some instances elative case may also appear, see (3). It is a less regular but still acceptable way to encode reason, which is usually used due to specific government in context.

(3) vojna iye-tn'e-ste   loma-tn'e   vacho-**sto**   jarza-st'   tikshe-d'e
    war   year-PL.DEF-EL   person-PL.DEF   hunger-EL   eat-PST.3PL   grass-ABL

'In wartime, people ate grass out of hunger.'

ii. Postpositions, encoding causativity in Erzya

There are some specialized causal postpositions in Erzya, but non-specialized ones may be used for causativity expression as well. Among postpositions with primary causal meaning are *kise* ('out'), *kuvalma* ('out') and *ejste* ('from'). All the aforementioned postpositions are interchangeable as they

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[1] In all the examples, bold format is used for highlighting explicit causal markers.
[2] Ablative case remains a basic causativity marker in other Finno-Ugric languages too, see (Davidyuk 2019).

remain similar semantic characteristics, see (4a)–(4b). However, *ejste* governs ablative as opposed to *kise* and *kuvalma*, governing genitive, see (4b).

(4a)   *ejkaksh-n'e*   *tur'e-zev-st'*   *pusha-st'*   **kise** / **kuvalma**
      child-PL   fight- INCH-PST.3PL   ball-GEN.DEF   out / out

    'The children fought over the ball.'

(4b)   *ejkaksh-n'e*   *tur'e-zev-st'*   *pusha-**do***   *ejste*
      child-PL   fight-INCH-PST.3PL   ball-ABL   from

    'The children fought over the ball.'

Postpositional phrase with any mentioned specialized causal postposition may be replaced with a noun phrase in ablative, see (5). Such replacement is mostly found in spoken language and is presumably related to the principle of economy.

(5) *ava-s^j*   *mad-s^j*   *udo-mo*   *orša-z^j*   *jakšamo-**dont**^j* /
    woman-NOM.DEF   lie.down-PST.3PL   sleep-INF   dress-CV   cold-ABL.DEF /
*jakšamo-**dost**^j*   **kise**
cold-GEN.DEF   out

'Because of the cold, the woman went to bed dressed (did not take off her clothes).'

Apart from that, postpositions with non-causal primary functions are discovered to be used in causal constructions. Among them are spatial (*langs* 'on (goal)', *langa* 'along', *lagso* 'on (location)'), temporal (*mejle* 'after') and comitative (*maro* 'with') ones. All of them appear in particular clauses expressing their primary semantics. For example, corresponding to its main meaning of aftereffect *mejle* has strict bounds of its distributions. See (6a)–(6b), where it is shown that acceptability of its usage depends on time frames of the events covered.

(6a)   *Petja* *meljavt-i*   *isyako-n'*   *doklado-**dost'***   *mejle*
      Peter worry-PRS.3SG   yesterday-GEN   presentation-ABL   after

    'Peter is worried about yesterday's presentation.'

(6b) **Petja*   *meljavt-i*   *vandi-n'*   *doklado-**dost'***   *mejle*
      Peter   worry-PRS.3SG   tomorrow-GEN   presentation-ABL   after

    'Peter is worried about tomorrow's presentation.'

Other postpositions display resemble pragmatic tendencies and appear in specific contexts only.

During the presentation we delve into the semantic features of each causal marker and try to clarify such distribution according to their primary semantics.

References

Davidyuk, Tat'jana. "Markery prichinnykh otnoshenij v finno-ugorskikh yazykakh." In *Predlozhenie kak edinica yazyka i rechi*, edited by Tyuntesheva E. V., 79–81. Novosibirsk: Akademizdat, 2019.