

Mapping syntactic position to functions of the discourse particle *dak* in Udmurt

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The discourse particle *dak* is found across several Uralic languages and in dialectal and colloquial varieties of Russian. The lexeme is a Russian borrowing, however its ability to occur postpositionally is an areal phenomenon characteristic of several Uralic languages and North Russian dialects. In the latter, Post (2015) has suggested a development path from the manner demonstrative (‘so’) and connective (‘then’) to a postpositive particle.

In Udmurt, *dak* can be used 1) sentence-initially; 2) sentence-internally; 3) subordinate clause-finally; 4) sentence-finally, in a variety of functions. The aim of this study is to map the syntactic positions of the particle *dak* in Udmurt to its functions. The analysis of data from the Corpus of Standard Udmurt (CSU, Arkhangelskiy & Medvedeva 2014) and the results of the acceptability judgment task performed by four speakers of Udmurt in Estonia in 2023–2024, show the following results.

1. In sentence-initial position, *dak* is primarily used as an interpersonal discourse connector similar to sentence-initial *well*, *so*, *but* in English (1). Sentence-initial *dak* is also attested in questions. Moving the particle to the sentence-final position is assessed as infelicitous in the context of (1).

(1) [– If you were from the same area as Serafim Sokolov and Viktor Tuganaev, you would know these words].

– **Dak** *mon* *kjk-ses* *ik* *tod-iško*.
DAK 1SG two-P.3PL.ACCEPTCL know-PRS.1

‘But I do know both of them!’ (“Udmurt duńne” 2009.05.20, CSU)

2. Sentence-internally, *dak* follows the topic (the contrastive topic “for boys” in (2)). Therefore, it can be seen as a postposed topic marker.

(2) *Nu,* *njl-jos-lj* *šot-iško-d* *už* *kudiz* *šekjt* *ik* *evel,*
PTCL girl-PL-DAT give-PRS-2 work which difficult PTCL NEG
a *pi-os-lj* ***dak*** *možno* *šekjt-ges* *kar-ijnj* *ińi*.
CONJ boy-PL-DAT PTCL can difficult-CMPR do-INF PTCL

‘Well, for girls, you find work that’s not very difficult, and [for boys]_{top}, you can make more difficult (tasks).’ (“Mjnam Udmurt’ije”, 2011.05.24, CSU)

A special case of sentence-internal use is the tautological construction “A *dak* A” that may have two interpretations: a degree exclamative (3) or “uncontrollable choice” (cf. Kopotev 2006 about the structurally identical Russian construction). Under both interpretations, the construction can be paraphrased using the conditional conjunction *ke*: “A *ke* A (*dak*)”.

(3) *Vot* *šuži,* ***dak,*** *šuži,* – *vožom-e* *kuzpal-ǰz*.
DEM idiot PTCL idiot get.angry-PRS.3SG spouse-POSS.3SG

‘What an idiot’ – his wife gets angry.’ (Ańekdotjos (serem.ru), 2016, CSU)

3. Subordinate clause-final use of *dak* is closely connected to topic marking. As the analysis of the Beserman data in Arkhangelskiy (2021) shows, *dak* often follows the postposed conditional conjunction *ke* ‘if’ or has the interpretation akin to English subordinating conjunction *once* when used without a conditional conjunction. The view of conditionals as topics has been widely discussed (e.g. Schiffrin 1992). The combination *ke dak* is rarely attested in written Udmurt corpora, e.g. (4):

(4) *Ma,* *badžim* *mašina-os* *mjn-o* ***ke*** ***dak,***
PTCL big car-PL go-PRS.3PL if PTCL
šiče *kol’eja* *lu-e* *otjn*.
such track become-PRS.3SG here

‘Well, if big cars go, such tracks appear there.’ (“Mjnam Udmurt’ije”, 2013.11.19, CSU)

4. Sentence-finally, *dak* may have a wide (sentential) or narrow (constituent) scope. In the former case, it introduces background information (cf. Arkhangelskiy 2021 for Beserman) which makes it close to a topic marker. When having a narrow scope (example 5), *dak* functions as a degree modifier with all possible classes of degree words (an adverb, an adjective, a verb, or a noun). The same distribution is characteristic of the Udmurt demonstrative *sjče* ‘so, such’ as opposed to standard Russian with its distinction between manner vs. quality demonstratives (König & Umbach 2018). The possibility of sentence-final *dak* to occur in questions is restricted (however, *dak* is allowed in wh-exclamatives).

(5) *Kjče so ekt-e, kjče so kjrža. Muso dak!*
how 3SG dance-PRS.3SG how 3SG sing.PRS.3SG nice PTCL

‘How she dances, how she sings. So nice(ly)!’ (“udmurto4ka.blogspot.ru”, CSU)

To sum up, the analysis shows that postposed *dak* occurs mainly either as a topic/background marker or as a degree modifier in Udmurt. The role of information structuring finds parallels in North Russian dialects (cf. Post 2015). However, the Udmurt material does not provide support for modeling the function of sentence-final *dak* through the ellipsis of the main clause (as in Post 2014: 257–258).

In my presentation, I will compare the findings with the descriptions of *dak* in Komi (Leinonen 2002), North Russian dialects (Post 2014, 2015), and Russian speech in the Volga-Kama area (Arkhangelskiy 2020, 2021; Merlin 1988).

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