Contact-induced change of Negative Indefinites – the case of Meadow Mari

Since the remarks about the borrowing of negative indefinite pronouns and adverbs (in short: negative indefinites (NI)) in Haspelmath's seminal 1997 book, research on contact-induced change of NI has greatly advanced. Newer research pertains not only to the question how and to what extent markers of NI, i.e., their morphology, can be borrowed, but also how language contact can shape the functional distribution of series of NI (e.g. Elšík & Matras 2006; Karjalainen 2019; Lucas 2013, 2020). In a recent monograph, Breitbarth et al. (2020: Ch. 7) argue, based on van Coetsem's (1988, 2000) model of language contact, that the outcome of contact-induced change of NI depends on the psycholinguistic dominance relations of bilingual speakers in contact situations: if speakers transfer material from an L2 into their dominant language, then transfer of form is usually what is found, whereas in situations of long-lasting bilingualism, the functions of NI may also structurally converge. In this talk I discuss an intriguing case of contact-induced change of NI in Meadow Mari which was likely caused both by direct borrowing of form and structural convergence, combining the two possible developments.

Meadow Mari is a Uralic language spoken by roughly 320,000 people (according to the 2021 All-Russian population census), largely in the Mari El Republic and adjacent areas, as well as in the Ural Mountains. It is situated in the Volga-Kama area, an area of intense historical language contact between Uralic (Mari, Udmurt) and Turkic (Tatar, Chuvash) languages, as well as later intense contact of those languages with Russian. The Uralic and Turkic languages of the area show a large number of lexical, phonological, and morphological convergences which are regarded as outcomes of this contact (e.g. Bereczki 1984; Hesselbäck 2005; Wintschalek 1993). The research of syntactic convergence in the area is still at a nascent stage, however.

NI in Mari, Chuvash, and Russian on the one hand show a morphological parallel; in all three languages, NI are prefixed with *ńi-*, a borrowing from Russian in Chuvash and Mari (Egorov 1964; Sibatrova 2021). However, the NI of Mari and Chuvash show additional, structural convergences to the exclusion of Russian which have so far remained unnoticed. For example, in both languages they are licit as standard of comparison (1–2) whereas this is not possible in Russian (3). The data suggests that this structural convergence between Mari and Chuvash arose independently of the borrowing of form from Russian.

(1)   Chuvash
        *Văl   axal'-ten   mar   [**nikam-ran**   ăsta   letčik] šutlan-nă.*
        3SG   simple-ABL   NEG   nobody-ABL skilled pilot   consider-prt.perf
        'Not for no reason was he considered an unsurpassed pilot.' (Chuv.-Rus.-Corpus)

(2)   Meadow Mari
        *Kö   tide saska-m   kočk-eš, tudo [**ńigö   deč   vijan   da   patər**]   lij-eš.*
        who   this fruit-ACC   eat-3SG 3SG   nobody from   strong and   powerful   be-3SG
        'He who eats this fruit will be stronger and more powerful than anyone else.' (Mari Corpus)

(3)   Russian
        *Zdes'   prijatn-ee   ži-t'   čem *nigde / gde-libo   v   mire.*
        here   comfortable-CMPR live-INF   than nowhere where-ever in   world.PREP
        'Here it is better to live than anywhere in the world.' (elicited)

In this talk I present ongoing research into the mechanisms of contact-induced change of NI. Based on corpus and elicited language data from Mari, Chuvash, and Russian, showing both convergent and divergent structural patterns of NI, I argue that the present-day distribution of the Mari NI can be attributed to multi-layered language contact with Chuvash and Russian, involving both syntactic convergence and morphological borrowing. Besides sketching the development of the Mari NI series, the talk will also discuss possible challenges that systems of negative indefinites as found in Mari and Chuvash can pose for typologies of negative indefinites.

References

- Bereczki, Gábor. 1984. Die Beziehungen zwischen den finnougrischen und türkischen Sprachen im Wolga-Kama-Gebiet. *Nyelvtudományi Közlemények* 86, 307–314. [The relations between the Finno-Ugric and Turkic languages of the Volga-Kama Area]
- Breitbarth, Anne, Christopher Lucas & David Willis. 2020. *The History of Negation in the Languages of Europe and the Mediterranean. Volume II: Patterns and Processes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chuv.-Rus.-Corpus = Dvujazyčnyj korpus čuvašskogo jazyka. https://ru.corpus.chv.su/ [Bilingual Russian-Chuvash Corpus]
- Egorov, V. G. 1964. *Etimologičeskij slovar' čuvašskogo jazyka*. Čeboksary: Čuvašskoe knižnoe izdatel'stvo. [Etymological dictionary of Chuvash]
- Elšík, Viktor & Yaron Matras. 2006. *Markedness and Language Change. The Romani Sample*. Empirical Approaches to Language Typology 32. Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Haspelmath, Martin. 1997. *Indefinite pronouns.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hesselbäck, André. 2005. *Tatar and Chuvash Code-copies in Mari.* Uppsala: Uppsala Universitetet.
- Karjalainen, Heini. 2019. Borrowing morphology: The influence of Russian on the Veps system of indefinite pronouns. In: Sofia Björklöf & Santra Jantunen (eds.) *Multilingual Finnic – Language contact and change*. Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 55–87.
- Lucas, Christopher. 2013. Negation in the history of Arabic and Afro-Asiatic. In: Dave Willis, Chrisopher Lucas & Anne Breitbarth (eds.) *The History of Negation in the Languages of Europe and the Mediterranean. Volume I: Case Studies.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 399–452.
- Lucas, Christopher. 2020. Contact and the expression of negation. In: Christopher Lucas & Stefano Manfredi (eds.) *Arabic and contact-induced change*. Berlin: Language Science Press, 643–667.
- Mari Corpus = Meadow Mari Corpus of the Giellatekno/Divvun Korp infrastructure: https://gtweb.uit.no/u_korp/?mode=mhr
- Sibatrova, Serafima. 2021. *Marijsko-russkie jazykovye kontakty: morfologija marijskogo jazyka*. Joškar-Ola: MarNIIJaLI. [Mari-Russian language contact: Morphology of Mari]
- Van Coetsem, Frans. 1988. *Loan phonology and the two transfer types in language contact*. Dordrecht: Foris.
- Van Coetsem, Frans. 2000. *A general and unified theory of the transmission process in language contact*. Heidelberg: Winter.
- Wintschalek, Walter. 1993. *Die Areallinguistik am Beispiel syntaktischer Übereinstimmungen im Wolga-Kama-Areal.* Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz. [Areal linguistics exemplified by syntactic correspondences in the Volga-Kama Area]