

**SLE-2017, ZURICH, 10-13 SEPTEMBER 2017**

# **DEFINITENESS MARKING IN MOKSHA**

**Egor Kashkin (RLI RAS)**  
**egorkashkin@rambler.ru**

# PROBLEM

- Moksha (< Mordvin < Finno-Ugric < Uralic), spoken in Russia, Republic of Mordovia.
- Three declension types: indefinite, definite, possessive.
- The possessive type: outside this talk, see e.g. Pleshak 2015 on Moksha possessive constructions; Toldova & Pleshak (this conference).
- What influences the choice between indefinite and definite declensions?



# DATA

- Fieldwork in 2013-2016 (in MSU field teams).
- Villages of Lesnoje Tsibaejvo and Lesnoje Ardashevo (Temnikov district, Mordovia, Russia).
- Elicitation + spontaneous texts.



## DECLENSION IN MOKSHA

- Indefinite (INDEF), definite (DEF), possessive.
- 16 cases (including many locative ones).
- Reduced number distinction (only for NOM in INDEF; only for NOM, GEN, DAT in DEF).
- A complicated network of DEF-INDEF correspondences in the case paradigm.



## PREVIOUS RESEARCH

- Definite declension for definiteness, indefinite declension for indefiniteness [Kolyadenkov, Zavodova 1962: 83], [Evseyev 1963: 56], [Tsygankin 1976], [Tsygankin 1980: 210].
- My field data: definiteness is an important factor, but not the only one.
  - + syntactic role (Sub – DO – IO – Obl).
  - + topic-focus (the framework of [Lambrecht 1994]).
- Typology: interaction of definiteness with other grammatical phenomena, see [Lyons 1999: 213–215, 227–236], [Fraurud 1990], [Gundel 2003], etc.
- But not at all described in Moksha.



## DEFINITE NPs

- DEF in SUB, DO, IO:

(1) *mon mol'-ən' ul'c'a-va i n'εj-ən' pin'ə,*  
I go-PST.1SG street-PROL and see-PST.1SG dog

*i pin'ə-s' / \*pin'ə uv-∅-əma-n'.*

and dog-DEF.SG dog bark-PST-1.O-SG.O.3SG.S

'I went along the street, saw a dog, and the dog barked at me'.

(2) *son maksə-∅-z'ə-∅ kajmə-n'ε-t'*

he give-PST-3SG.S-3SG.O spade-DIM-DEF.SG.GEN

*n'av's'ε s'ora-n'ε-t'i / \*s'ora-n'ε-n'd'i*

that boy-DIM-DEF.SG.DAT boy-DIM-DAT

'He gave the spade to that boy'.



## DEFINITE NPs

- Split in Obl (DEF in PPs + possible INDEF in locative case forms):

(3) *vaz'-s'*      *ašč-i-∅*      *t'ε*      ***karopka-t'***      ***esə*** /  
cap-DEF.SG be-NPST.3-SG this box-DEF.SG.GEN IN

***karopka-sə***

box-IN

'The cap is in this box'.

(4) *vaz'-s'*      *ašč-i-∅*      *t'ε*      ***karopka-t'*** /  
cap-DEF.SG be-NPST.3-SG this box-DEF.SG.GEN

***\*karopka-n'*** /      ***\*karopka***      ***lank-sə***

box-GEN

box

on-IN

'The cap is on this box'.



# DEFINITE NPs

- Geographical names: the same split, INDEF is even more preferable for locative cases.

(5) *moskuv-s'* / *\*moskuv*    *oc'u*    *oš*  
Moscow-DEF.SG    Moscow    big    city  
'Moscow is a big city'.

(6) *volga-s'*                    *s'adə*    *kuvaka*                    *n'eva-t' /*  
Volga-DEF.SG                    more    long                    Neva-DEF.SG.GEN  
*\*n'eva /*                    *\*n'eva-n'*                    *kor'as*  
Neva                    Neva-GEN                    than  
'Volga is longer than Neva'.

(7) *mon*    *tuj-an*                    *moskuv-u*                    / <sup>OK</sup>*moskuv-t'i*  
I            leave-NPST.1SG            Moscow-LAT            Moscow-DEF.SG.DAT  
'I will leave for Moscow'.



# INDEFINITE AND NON-SPECIFIC NPs

- INDEF

(8) *t'ɛd'ɛ-z'ə*                      *mɛr'k-s'-∅*                      *što*                      *t'ɛ*  
mother-1SG.POSS.SG say-PST.3-SG                      that                      this

*ul'c'ɛ-t'*                      *esə ul'-i-∅*                      *lavka*                      */\*lavka-s'*  
street-DEF.SG.GEN in.IN be-NPST.3-SG shop                      shop-DEF.SG

‘Mother said that there was a shop in this street’.

(9) *pet'ɛ-n'd'i er'av-i-∅*                      *od*                      *ščam*  
Pete-DAT be.necessary-NPST.3-SG                      new                      jacket

/                      *\*ščam-s'*  
jacket-DEF.SG

‘Pete needs a new jacket’.



## INDEFINITE AND NON-SPECIFIC NPs

- DEF is possible for selection from a set.

(10) *ul'c'a-sə aščə-s'-∅ lamə loman', i fkε*  
street-IN be-PST.3-SG many man and one

*al'ε-s' / al'ε las'kə-z' tu-s'-∅*  
man-DEF.SG man run-CONV.ATD go-PST.3-SG

*kud-ən'kə-n' šir'-i*  
house-1PL.POSS-GEN near-LAT

'There were many people in the street, and a man from this group ran towards our house'.



## GENERIC NPs

- Referential properties & syntactic role & information structure.
- Sub, DO: reference to a complete class – DEF; not complete class – DEF is preferable for topic, INDEF is preferable for focus.



## GENERIC NPs

- Sub, DO: complete class – DEF

(11) *s'arc'* / \**s'ardə*      *juma-s'-∅*      *min'*  
elk.DEF.SG elk      disappear-PST.3-SG      we.OBL

*vir'-stə-nək*

forest-EL-1PL.POSS

'The elk [animal species] disappeared from our forests'.

(12) *zaapark-stə*      *juma-s'-∅*      *s'ardə*  
zoo-EL      disappear-PST.3-SG elk

'An elk [one specific animal] disappeared from the zoo'.



## GENERIC NPs

- Sub, DO: not complete class – DEF is preferable for topic, INDEF is preferable for focus.

(13) *abed-ən'd'i min' s'emika-sə-nək pic'-əv-i-∅*  
 lunch-DAT we.OBL family-IN-1SG.POSS.PL cook.IPFV-PASS-NPST.3-SG

*l'εm, af jam / <sup>OK</sup>l'εm-s', af jam-s'*  
 soup NEG porridge soup-DEF.SG NEG porridge-DEF.SG

'For lunch one usually cooks soup, but not porridge in our family'.

(14) *l'εm-s' / <sup>OK</sup>l'εm min' s'emika-sə-nək*  
 soup-DEF.SG soup we.OBL family-IN-1SG.POSS.PL

*pic'-əv-i-∅ abed-ən'd'i, af užen-ən'd'i*  
 cook.IPFV-PASS-NPST.3-SG lunch-DAT NEG dinner-DAT

'Soup is usually cooked in our family for lunch, but not for dinner'.

## GENERIC NPs

- IO: DEF / INDEF

(15) *it'-t'i* / *id'-ən'd'i* *er'av-i-∅*  
child-DEF.SG.DAT child-DAT be.necessary-NPST.3-SG

*kor-n'-əm-s* *an'c'ək* *c'ebɛr' val-t*  
say-IPFV-INF-ILL only good word-PL

'As for a child (in general), one should tell him/her only kind words'.

(16) *baba-z'ə* *mon' fs'egda kor-n'ə-s'-∅,*  
grandmother-1SG.POSS.SG I.OBL always say-IPFV-PST.3-SG

*što* *dobraj val* *er'av-i-∅*  
that kind word be.necessary-NPST.3-SG

*katə-t'i-ngə* / *katə-n'd'i-ngə*  
cat-DEF.SG.DAT-ADD cat-DAT-ADD

'My grandmother always said that even a cat needs a kind word'.

## GENERIC NPs

- Obl: INDEF

(17) *vel'ə-n' lomat'-t'n'əkel'k-sa-z' vir'-sə*  
village-GEN man-DEF.PL like-NPST:3.O-3.S.PL.S/O forest-IN  
*/ʔʔvir'-t' esə gul'anda-ma-snə-n*  
forest-DEF.SG.GEN in.IN walk-NZR-3PL.POSS-GEN

‘People living in villages like walking in a forest’.

(18) *son optəm er'a-f-ənc*  
he all live-PTCP.RES-3SG.POSS.SG.GEN  
*rabota-∅-z'ə-∅ škola-t' esə*  
work-PST-3SG.S-3SG.O school-DEF.SG.GEN in.IN

‘All her life she worked at school’ (at a specific school / \*at school in general; only *školasə* ‘school-IN’ for the latter).







# UNIVERSAL NPs

*εr'* 'every, each', *l'ubovaj* 'any': DEF in Sub, DO; DEF/INDEF in IO, Obl.

(22) *εr' loman'-c' / \*loman' dolžən kel'g-əm-s*

every man-DEF.SG man must love-INF-ILL

*es' rad'it'əl'-ənzə-n*

REFL parent-3SG.POSS.PL-GEN

'Everyone (lit.: Every man) must love their parents'.

(23) *mon' baba-z'ə εr' loman'-t'i /*

I.OBL grandmother-1SG.POSS.SG every man-DEF.SG.DAT

*loman'ə-n'd'i pomaga-j-∅, af atkaza-j-∅*

man-DAT help-NPST.3-SG NEG refuse-NPST.3-SG

'My grandmother helps everyone (lit.: every man), does not refuse'.

(24) *pet'ε lad'ε-z'əv-i εr' loman'-t' /*

Pete get.on-INCH-NPST.3-SG every man-DEF.SG.GEN

*loman'-ən' mar̩tə*

man-GEN with

'Pete will get on with everyone (lit.: every man)'.



## PREDICATE NPs

- INDEF if a head is focal.

(25) – *ko-sə*                    *rabəta-j-∅*                    *maša?*  
          where-IN                work-NPST.3-SG                Masha  
–        *son*    *učit'el'n'ica* /                *\*učit'el'n'ica-s'*  
          she    teacher                                teacher-DEF.SG

‘– What is Masha’s occupation? – She is a teacher’.

- DEF is possible if a head is topical.

(26) *kodamə maša azərava-s'*                    / <sup>OK</sup>*azərava?*  
          what    Masha housewife-DEF.SG    housewife  
– *maša*        *c'ebər' azərava-s'*                    /        <sup>OK</sup>*azərava.*  
          Masha    good housewife-DEF.SG                    housewife

‘What kind of housewife is Masha? – Masha is a GOOD housewife’.



# SYNTACTIC FUNCTION

- Splits on various points of the hierarchy.
- Sometimes an additional factor of case marking (the same in PP as in Sub or DO).

	Sub	DO	IO	Obl (case)	Obl (PP)
Definite + Universal ('all')	DEF	DEF	DEF	DEF / INDEF	DEF
Indefinite + non-specific	INDEF	INDEF	INDEF	INDEF	INDEF
Generic	DEF / INDEF	DEF / INDEF	DEF / INDEF	INDEF	INDEF
Universal ('every', 'each')	DEF	DEF	DEF / INDEF	DEF / INDEF	DEF / INDEF

# SYNTACTIC FUNCTION

- Other Uralic languages – sometimes more variation in the oblique position.
- Discourse possessives → Definiteness markers in Izhma Komi: less strict rules for Obl [Kashkin 2008].
- Number marking: less strict rules for Obl [Sidorova, this conference].



# INFORMATION STRUCTURE

- Mostly relevant for generic and predicate NPs.
- Correlations: topic – DEF, focus – INDEF.
- Cf. some similar effects for DOM / object conjugation in Uralic [Nikolaeva 1999], [Serdobolskaya, Toldova 2012, 2017].
- In Moksha referential status is more important (contrary to e.g. object agreement in Khanty).



# CONCLUSIONS

- Not only referential properties influencing definiteness marking.
- Interaction with the syntactic role and topic-focus structure.
- Oblique position → more variation.
- Syntactic position vs. morphological marking.
- Definiteness marking is sometimes favoured by the topical status.

