Converbs in Udmurt – a unified class?

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1 Introduction   In this talk I deal with converb clauses in Udmurt (Finno-Ugric, Permic). Converbs are non-finite verb forms whose main function is to express adverbial subordination (Haspelmath 1995). I will argue that converbs in Udmurt do not constitute a unified class syntactically and morphologically. The discussion will touch upon a recent theoretical proposal on converb clauses (Weisser 2014) and several case studies of individual languages, such as Hungarian (Bartos 2009), Tsakhur (Kazenin & Testelets 2004) and Kazakh (Ótott-Kovács 2015). The language data come partly from own fieldwork as well as from descriptive grammars.

2 Converb clauses in Udmurt   Udmurt has both finite and non-finite subordination. Non-finite predicates can form relative, adjunct or argument clauses. In Udmurt, converbs head adjunct clauses denoting various adverbial relations. The relevant converb morphemes are -*ku* 'when/while'-clause; -*toź* 'while/until/rather than'-clause, resultative (small clause/predicate); -*sa* manner/reason/purpose or vague temporal clause; -*tek* 'without'-clause; -*mon* '-able + -ly'; -*(e)men* reason clause; and -*onja* 'when/while'-clause.

3 Morphology   The suffixes -*tek* and -*ku* are most probably nominal suffixes/postpositions; the origin of the converb -*sa* is disputed. The converb morphemes -*toź*, -*(e)men* and -*onja* are segmentable into a nominalization and a case suffix (to a varying degree). Hence, it is controversial whether converbs in Udmurt form a class morphologically. Nonetheless, they do have some syntactic properties in common.

4 Syntactic similarities   All converb clauses are *deranked*, i.e. their tense value is dependent on the matrix clause. Additionally, they lack negation and other functional layers of the C domain, which suggests that they are *truncated* clauses. Converb clauses in Udmurt can have either a null or an overt subject in the nominative (but see below for discussion). These clauses typically precede the matrix clause, but can also follow it. Additionally, center embedding is also attested. In this case, the converb clause appears in between the subject and rest of the matrix clause. The possibility of center embedding suggests that we are dealing with a subordinate clause (Weisser 2014, Kazenin & Testelets 2004).

5 Syntactic differences   Weisser (2014) argues that all converb clauses are adjoined to the matrix Spec,vP. Given the variety of functions the Udmurt converbs display, I propose that they can have various attachment sites in the matrix clause (in line with Bartos 2009). The height of attachment correlates with several syntactic properties, such as the possibility of an overt subject, the choice of controller, and the (surface) position of the converb clause with respect to the matrix verb.

6 Proposal   Converb clauses in Udmurt can be adjoined to (at least) the following projections in the matrix clause. Resultatives, headed by the converb -*toź*, are attached low in the structure, below Voice. They cannot have an overt subject and show object control (if the converb modifies a transitive verb). The second option is attachment above Voice: manner adverbials, headed by -*sa*, -*tek* and -*mon*. These clauses cannot have an overt subject and allow for subject control, similarly to their Kazakh counterparts (Ótott-Kovács 2015). Both resultatives and manner adverbials appear adjacent to the matrix verb. Temporal and reason/purpose adverbials are attached higher, to the matrix TP. These clauses allow for an overt subject and show subject control. I assume that underlyingly, Same-Subject clauses (i.e. when the subject of the matrix clause and the converb clause is the same) are instances of center embedding. Later, the converb clause may undergo further movement to the C domain. Different-Subject clauses, on the other hand, can be either attached to the TP or base-generated in the C domain (similarly to sentential adverbials).

References

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