On the functions of retrospective shift markers in the languages of the Volga–Kama Sprachbund and Russian

The term *retrospective shift marker* is used in description of temporal constructions, which include a TAME-marked finite lexical verb and a finite-origin item petrified from the 3rd person singular past tense form of the verb 'to be'. This 'was'-element functions as a shift marker that moves the interpretation of an event to past from the deictic location of the speaker. Constructions of this kind are found in several Eurasian languages, including Turkic, Uralic, Slavic and Northwest Caucasian. (Plungian – van der Auwera 2006: 344; Arkadiev 2020: 10.) Examples (1) and (2) illustrate the construction type in Udmurt (Uralic) and Russian (Slavic) with finite past tenses combined with 'was'-element:

1. Udmurt
    So   tolon   tone   utčaz   val   no, öz   šed́ty.
    3SG   yesterday   2SG.ACC   look.PST.3SG   was   but   NEG.PST.3SG   find.CNG
    'He was looking for you yesterday, but did not find [you].' (Kel'makov–Hännikäinen 2008: 269.)

2. Russian
    On   pošol   bylo   proguljat'sya,   no   peredumal.
    3SG   start.going.PST   was   carous.INF   but   change.mind.PST
    'He went out to go carousing, but changed his mind.' (Timberlake 2004: 398.)

The employment of the 'was'-elements can have various semantic effects. In our study, we will start a comparative discussion on the syntactic and semantic properties of the constructions in the Uralic and Turkic languages of the Volga–Kama Sprachbund as well as in Russian based on corpus data and previous studies. Even though a temporal manipulation is presumably the primary function of the constructions, it has later on been either complemented or overridden by modal readings in the languages in question. In the examples above, they appear in so-called 'future counterfactual' functions, where the possibilities of the marked event are not fulfilled in the actual world. Originally developed from past perfect constructions, the future counterfactuals (e.g. Goeringer 1995 and Kagan 2011 for Russian; Saraheimo 2022 for Udmurt) represent a change from temporal ordering to modal evaluation. We propose that this kind of development derives from the concept of retrospectivization itself, which is a perspective category. The shift markers namely move the perspective to the observer inside the past event (c.f. *temporal perspective point* as in Kamp–Reyle 1993; also Spets, forthcoming), which in case of future counterfactuals makes the first event an estimation about how the subject referent expects the dynamic possibilities of the event to develop. When this subjective viewpoint is made explicit with the shift marker, this evokes an implication of modally abnormal continuation of the event, that is, interruption or annulled result (Kagan 2011, c.f. Plungian – van der Auwera 2006). Examples on the fundamental perspectivization function of the shift markers will be provided in the presentation.

In addition to functional analysis, we will discuss the areal distribution of the retrospective shift markers. Found in unrelated but geographically somewhat close languages, the possibilities of code-copying are evaluated.

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