Quotative saying and reference shift in the Uralic languages of the Volga-Kama Region

Languages across Northern Eurasia and Siberia utilize a converb (adverbial non-finite form) of a verb SAY as a postposed complementizer that heads finite subordinate clauses, especially in combination with verbs of diction as well as cognitive and emotive predicates.

(1) Western Even (Tungusic, Matić & Pakendorf 2013: 373)
Ọːn	biː	ụnta-wa-n	haŋan-dʒɨ-m	**goːniken**	merget-ti-w.
How	1SG	fur.boot-ACC-3SG	sew-FUT-1SG	**say.SIM.CVB**	think-PST-1SG

'I thought about how I will sew fur boots.' ~ 'I thought, saying "How will I sew fur boots".'

While non-canonical usage of SAY is typologically common (cf. Kuteva et al. 2019: 375–379), the spread of this exact structure over a large but cohesive geographical domain suggests a common origin of these structures. Given that this phenomenon can be observed in languages belonging to different genealogical groupings (Mongolic, Tungusic, Turkic, Yukaghir, Uralic), a contact-linguistic interpretation is the most likely.

The Uralic languages of the Volga-Kama Region of European Russia constitute the north-western boundary of this convergence zone. Quotative SAY, here calqued from Turkic languages (Isanbayev 1961, Klumpp 2016: 539–540), can be found only in those Uralic languages of the region that have been subject to extensive Turkic influence, Mari (*manən*, cf. Toldova & Serdobol'skaya 2014; Riese et al. 2017: 302–303, 354) and Udmurt (*šuįsa*, Klumpp 2016: 539–540) but not in closely related Komi.

Quotative SAY goes hand in hand with indexical shift (cf. Podobryaev 2014 for Mishar Tatar, a Turkic language of the Volga-Kama Region), where an indexical (e.g., *I*, *you*, *here*, *now*) is interpreted not in the utterance context but in the reported context (see Deal 2020). Preliminary data on Mari and Udmurt shows this to be the case here as well, with 1SG forms in embedded SAY clauses being interpreted as coreferential with a non-1SG subject of the matrix clause. The usage of personal pronouns in otherwise pro-drop Mari (cf. Riese et al. 2019: 137) however allows speakers to block this shift of reference and force 1SG forms to be interpreted as referring to the speaker.

(2) Mari (Uralic, elicited from native informants, only preferred interpretation provided)

a.
čəla	*əšt-en*	*kert-am*	*man-ən*	*šon-a*
everything	do-CVB	be.able-1SG	say-CVB	think-3SG

'S/he₁ thinks that s/he₁ (herself/himself) can do everything.'

b.
čəla	*əšt-en*	*kert-eš*	*man-ən*	*šon-a*
everything	do-CVB	be.able-3SG	say-CVB	think-3SG

'S/he₁ thinks that s/he₂ (somebody else) can do everything.'

c.
tudo	*məj*	*čəla*	*əšt-en*	*kert-am*	*man-ən*	*šon-a*
3SG	1SG	everything	do-CVB	be.able-1SG	say-CVB	think-3SG

'S/he thinks that I (speaker) can do everything.'

This paper will present ongoing empirical research into the exact mechanisms of reference shift in connection with quotative SAY in Mari and Udmurt, looking especially at the relationship between pronoun usage and interpretation, and at similarities in the neighbouring Turkic languages Tatar and Chuvash to illustrate how fine-grained special syntactic-semantic constructions can be calqued in intensive contact situations.

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