

The expression of epistemic modality in the Volga-Kama Sprachbund

Epistemic modality indicates that the certainty or possibility of the information described is based on the speaker's personal opinion (van der Auwera & Ammann 2013). It differs from situational (or elsewhere dynamic and deontic, see Nuyts 2012, de Haan 2012) modality, which indicates that an action can or need to take place according to internal or external factors, such as basic human needs or social conventions. Epistemic modality does not refer to these allowing or restricting factors, but the speaker's degree of certainty that the action takes place (Nuyts 2016).

Epistemic modality can be expressed in a number of ways: verbal affixes, periphrastic verbal constructions, subordinate clauses and lexical modifiers (van der Auwera & Ammann 2013). Usually more than one strategy is used within a language. It often overlaps with situational modality, as some markers may be used to express both, while some are suitable for either one or the other. Since most of the languages of the Volga-Kama Sprachbund are well documented from a formal approach (Berezcki 1990, Riese et al. 2017, Johanson & Csató 1998, Kel'makov & Hännikäinen 2008, etc.), the markers of situational modality (possibility and necessity alike) are easy to find in these works. Few of them, however, provide information about the expression of epistemic modality, which may be due to the fact that it's often expressed by subordinate clauses (such as *I think that...*) and lexical modifiers (such as *maybe*, or in Russian, *наверно*), none of which – understandably – are matters of main interest in a traditional descriptive grammar.

My presentation will focus on three questions: 1) how epistemic modality is expressed in each language of the Volga-Kama Sprachbund (Erza, Moksha, Mari, Udmurt, Chuvash, Tatar, Bashkir), 2) do these strategies overlap with situational modality within the language, 3) what kind of similarities or differences can be observed cross-linguistically in these languages.

It is interesting on its own to see how these types of modality are expressed within a language, but it's even more fascinating to see them in a cross-linguistic perspective, since oftentimes the same markers are found within various languages of the Sprachbund, but their usage might differ. For example, in Meadow Mari, one of the most commonly used markers to express epistemic necessity is the future necessitive participle *-šaš*, but it is also used to express situational necessity. Another, periphrastic construction, that consists of INF + *küleš* 'to need', however, marks only situational, but never epistemic necessity, while in Udmurt the etymologically related INF + *kule* 'to need' construction is used to express both situational and epistemic necessity. The use of the same construction may differ in languages as close as Erzya and Moksha, where *eravi* 'to need' + INF can express epistemy in the former, but not in the latter. Another exciting aspect is the epistemic lexical modifiers that can be found across these languages, such as *dər/tər*, which can be found in Chuvash, Tatar, Mari and Udmurt (Berezcki 1983: 226). In some languages (such as Udmurt) these are the only means (besides subordination) to mark epistemic possibility, in others (such as Mari), there are other strategies as well.

Marking the speaker's certainty or doubt in their statement important in any given language, and it is one of those questions that cannot be answered by studying formal grammars. However, besides bringing us to better understanding of how each language works, it brings us

closer to the migration and semantic shift that can happen to grammatical elements within a Sprachbund.

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