The making of affixes: morphologization of function words in Mari

Several widely used function words (postpositions, conjunctions, particles) in Mari are orthographically realized with an initial <д> /d/ or <г> /g/ (henceforth *D&G words*): *дене* /dene/ 'with', *да* /da/ 'and', *гына* /gə̂na/ 'only'. This seems at first curious as Mari phonotactics do not allow for these sounds in the word-initial position (**Ivanov 2000: 90**), but is simply the product of an arbitrary convention of Mari orthography: the words in question cannot occur in sentence-initial position, obligatorily have a host word, and are subject to orthographically unmarked voice assimilation (/d/ ~ /t/, /g/ ~ /k/): *йолташем дене* /joltašem dene/ 'with my friend', but *йолташет дене* /joltašet tene/ 'with your friend' (**Ivanov 2000: 130–131**). Undoubtedly these words have been cliticized, where a clitic is understood as "a bound word-form – i.e. a word-form that is prosodically dependent on a host" (**Haspelmath & Sims 2010: 322**).

This raises the question: is it also the product of an arbitrary convention that these elements are considered words in the first place, rather than affixes (case suffixes and clitics)? This paper will address the classification of the assorted D&G words in Mari, addressing the following questions:

- Do all function words starting in orthographic <д> or <г> fall into this category, or can some of them be found in sentence initial position without a host word? This will be examined based on recently published corpora of literary Mari.
- How do postpositional D&G words differ in morphosyntax from other elements frequently assigned to the category of postpositions – relational nouns such as *йымалне* /jə̂malne/ 'under' (< *йымал* /jə̂mal/ 'bottom')? What are differences in syntax (what degrees of freedom do the respective words enjoy as regards their placement) and in person marking?
- Does a survey of the dialectal text collections of Mari containing transcripts from the late 19th and early 20th century give any indication of dialectal and short-scale diachronic differences are regards these parameters?
- Some of the postpositions in question have been classified as complementary to the case system especially in Finnish sources (**Alhoniemi 1985: 62**). To what extent is this based on a "top-down view" (i.e., like Finnish Mari has an illative and inessive case, but what is the functional counterpart to the Finnish elative case?), and to what extent is this classification suggested by the data itself?
- Numerous D&G words are borrowings (e.g., *да* /da/ 'and' < Chuvash, *гына* /gə̂na/ 'only' < Tatar, **Moisio & Saarinen 2008: 123, 145**) – can morphology-like parameters assigned to these words in Mari already be assigned to these words in the source languages?

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