

# The puzzle of Mari 1SG-optatives<sup>1</sup>

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In this talk, I focus on one optative construction in Mari (< Uralic), where the lexical verb takes an invariable 1SG form that does not agree in person with the subject and further attaches a retrospective marker (1).

- (1) LITERARY MEADOW MARI (<http://marlamuter.com/muter/en/Search>)

<i>ija</i>	<i>nun-əm</i>	<i>kočk-am</i>	<i>əl'e!</i>
devil	they-ACC	eat-NPST.1SG	RETR

‘Damn him!’ (lit. ‘may devil eat him!’)

I address the questions of how this optative construction (henceforth *1SG-optative*) was grammaticalized and whether its origin has to do with reported speech.

The data comes from fieldwork conducted in 2016–2019 in the villages of Chodrayal (Meadow Mari, Volzhsky district, Mari El), Kuznetsovo, and Mikryakovo (Hill Mari, Gornomariysky district). Besides, I elicited some literary Meadow Mari data online and used textual sources.

As optative meanings are more often expressed by the jussive form in *-že*, 1SG-optative is rare and underdescribed. However, it is present at least in literary Meadow Mari, Chodrayal and Mikryakovo varieties.

The use of 1SG forms in an optative construction is enigmatic. Sources on the grammaticalization of optatives, e.g. (Sadock, Zwicky 1985: 164), do not provide insight on this development. A possible idea would be that 1SG-optative may stem from some construction introducing direct speech. For example, in Tatar (< Turkic), which had contact influence on Mari, prospective constructions have developed from direct speech constructions with 1SG forms (Nevskaja 2005):

- (2) TATAR (own fieldwork)

<i>agač</i>	<i>awa-m</i>	<i>awa-m</i>	<i>dī-p</i>	<i>tor-a</i>
tree	fall-PRS.1SG	fall-PRS.1SG	say-CVB	stand-PRS.3SG

‘This tree is about to fall’ (lit.: the tree stands saying: “I will fall”).

However, the Mari 1SG-optative contains no additional morphological material such as *dip tora* in Tatar. Deriving optative meaning from a construction like (2) is also problematic. Instead, constructions like (3) may shed light on the development of 1sg-optatives:

- (3) LITERARY MARI (<http://marlamuter.com/muter/en/Search>)

<i>əš</i>	<i>šižtare</i>	<i>vet,</i>	<i>keč</i>	<i>šinča-m</i>	<i>püjal-am</i>	<i>äle!</i>
NEG.AOR.3SG	warn	PTCL	PTCL	eye-ACC	wink-NPST.1SG	RETR

‘She didn’t warn {me}, at least she could have winked her eye!’

Here, two clauses share the same 3SG subject. The second clause’s predicate expresses speaker’s counterfactual preference and the verb is in 1SG. While the combination of a non-past form and a

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retrospective marker is expected to yield a counterfactual reading, an interesting question is why the verb in this construction is in 1SG. I propose that this is due to a perspective shift (Spronck et al. 2020), i.e. the speaker literally says ‘She didn’t warn me, {if I were her}, I would have winked at least’. The next step is insubordination of the second clause, which develops into optative.

The scenario outlined above is further supported by the evidence from Hill Mari dialects, where the form in *-šaš* can be used in contexts (1, 3) and a similar process can be postulated.

### Sources

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