

# SYNTAX OF THE URALIC LANGUAGES: PRINCIPAL FEATURES AND CHALLENGES. INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE OF ESUKA – JEFUL

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**Abstract.** This introductory paper presents the context and current challenges of Uralic syntactic studies. The brief summary of seven selected papers from the SOUL-4 conference published in the present issue is followed by an overview of six topics from the domain of Uralic syntax, namely: differential object marking; object agreement; impersonal constructions; the syntax of minor parts of speech; subordination and non-finite predication; and possessive constructions. The aim of this overview is to show how intricate and, in some ways, how unfamiliar Uralic syntax looks from the Standard Average European perspective and how many issues still await further study.

**Keywords:** Uralic languages, syntax, differential object marking, object agreement, impersonal constructions, minor parts of speech, subordination, possessive constructions

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## 1. Introductory notes

The basis for the study of Uralic languages was laid down in the middle of the 19th century, when the historical-comparative paradigm dominated in linguistics and many fields now central to the discipline, such as phonology, did not yet exist. At that time, the importance of syntax was not yet recognized. The core role of syntax in linguistics became clear in the 20th century, but Uralic studies to a large extent followed the tradition of the 19th century, and many grammars of Uralic languages did not include a section on syntax at all.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See the overview of the development of Uralic grammaticography in Klumpp, Mazzitelli & Rozhanskiy (2018: 11).

For most of the 20th century, the majority of Uralic communities lay within the territory of the USSR, and the description of their languages was greatly influenced by the Russian linguistic tradition. The syntactic descriptions of that period used the approaches generally adopted by Russian grammarians. The application of syntactic theory developed for the description of Russian to the Uralic languages was far from straightforward, since the Uralic languages demonstrate many structural differences from Russian. The rise of interest in syntax in American linguistics left most Uralic languages unnoticed (mainly as a result of the lack of easily accessible data on these languages).

There was also an additional circumstance that led to a relatively weak interest in the syntax of the Uralic languages. In the typological literature, Uralic was most commonly represented by Finnic (primarily Finnish) and Hungarian (Norvik et al. 2022: 4–5), which of all the Uralic languages show the greatest similarity to the Indo-European languages of Europe (Haspelmath 2001: 1493). As a result of this bias the Uralic languages in general were assumed to share many of the features of Standard Average European languages (see Haspelmath 2001 on this notion), and thus not to be especially “exotic”. At the same time, due to the vast areal spread and significant linguistic diversity of the Uralic languages, they were often described against the background of other neighbouring languages, i.e. Indo-European languages of Europe on the one hand and Turkic on the other, cf. Comrie’s (1981) typological overview of the Uralic languages. The diversity of Uralic languages is another obstacle to creating a generalized linguistic portrait of Uralic, in contrast, for instance, to Turkic or Semitic. As a result, many phenomena specific to Uralic were overlooked or viewed through the prism of other languages.

Only in recent decades has the syntax of the Uralic languages begun to receive sufficient attention, and many studies have now been published in this domain. The current state of research on this and other aspects of Uralic languages has been summarized in two recently published volumes (Bakró-Nagy, Laakso & Skribnik 2022; Abondolo & Valijärvi 2023). A significant achievement was also the establishment of a regular conference “Syntax of Uralic Languages” (SOUL). It was launched as a two-workshop event at the 12th International Congress for Finno-Ugric Studies (held in Oulu in 2015) but later became an independent conference, which took place in Budapest (2017) and in Tartu

(2019). The fourth conference was planned to take place in St. Petersburg in 2021 but it was postponed as a result of COVID restrictions, and in 2022 it was reformatted into an online conference due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This special issue of ESUKA – JEFUL contains selected papers from the SOUL-4 conference.<sup>2</sup> These papers do not belong to a single linguistic subfield and do not focus on a particular branch of Uralic. On the contrary, our aim was to show the diversity of the issues dealt with by Uralic syntactic research.

The paper by Tuomas Huumo focuses on the Finnish adpositions *kohti* ‘towards’ and *päin* ‘towards’, which take a dependent noun in the partitive case. The author meticulously analyses the extensive evidence pertaining to the semantics of these adpositions, their development, and the behaviour of other syntactically similar adpositions in Finnish and other closely related languages. He considers three hypotheses concerning the origins and grammatical behaviour of these adpositions, and ultimately concludes that they were first lexicalized as directional adverbs and were only reanalysed much later as adpositions governing the partitive case. The source of this government pattern was the construction where the partitive object was originally a Target participant of the verb, such as ‘shoot’ or ‘aim’.

In the paper by Ritva Laury, Renate Pajusalu, and Marja-Liisa Helasvuo, constructions with relative clauses are studied on the basis of material from Estonian and Finnish spoken corpora. The research investigates syntactic features and the status of the relative clause. Providing rich empirical evidence, the authors show that in spoken data from these two languages, relative clauses tend to be used with main clauses which are syntactically light (existential or copular clauses) or without any main clause (headed with a free noun phrase). Thus, the relative clause typically conveys the main information in the clause combination and is syntactically more elaborate, which may bring into question its subordinate status.

Maria Ovsjannikova traces the development of the conditional converb of the verb ‘say’ in Forest Enets into a conditional clause marker, which is likely to be motivated by the use of the conditional converb to express supposition in independent clauses. Corpus data from two

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2 Several papers from this conference have been already published in *Journal of Uralic Linguistics* 2(2), 2023.

generations of speakers show changes in this converb's form and syntactic behaviour indicative of the processes of grammaticalization and lexicalization, which have taken place in the language along with attrition.

Elena Markus analyses the distribution of the discourse particles *no* and *nu* in the Soikkola dialect of Ingrian. Although similar in both their phonetic shape and their meaning, these particles are likely to have different origins: while *no* is of Finnic origin, *nu* is a Russian borrowing. Comparing their syntactic and functional properties, Markus addresses the intriguing question of their current status, i.e. whether they represent independent particles or phonetic variants of a single particle. She arrives at the conclusion that these two particles have almost entirely merged in Soikkola Ingrian.

Fedor Rozhanskiy's paper describes the syntax of the numeral phrase in Soikkola Ingrian. This paper is based mostly on field data recorded in the 21st century and addresses two issues: the case marking of the constituents of the numeral phrase and its agreement with other components of the clause. Generally, the structure of the Ingrian numeral phrase is typically Finnic, although there is also evidence of some Russian contact influence. As for agreement with the numeral phrase, the type of verb ('be' as opposed to other verbs) and word order (whether the verb precedes or follows the numeral phrase) are the most important factors determining the number marking found on the verb.

The paper by Polina Oskolskaia deals with Finnic constructions of the type "to be + passive participle", which can be analysed as impersonal or passive depending on their syntactic features. Two approaches to the analysis of these constructions are employed: (1) a corpus-based study on the Veps material and (2) a survey among native speakers of Estonian. The study shows that negation and word order are the factors associated with construction type here, while some other parameters among those analysed (tense form of the verb, static vs dynamic semantic class, etc.) were not found to be significant.

Maria Usacheva and Maria Brykina examine Beserman Udmurt constructions in which adjectives show number agreement with the nominal head. Combining evidence from elicitation and a multimedia corpus, they provide a thorough analysis of the constructions' syntactic properties and information structure, namely contrast and topic-focus status. For one of the constructions (with preposed *-(j)eś*-marked adjectives),

they suggest a development from a construction with narrow focus on the adjective to genuine adjectival number agreement.

Operating with different approaches, data and issues, this collection of seven papers largely reflects the current state of research on Uralic syntax. As we hope to show in this paper, much has been done in recent years to revise and enrich the traditional descriptions of core topics in Uralic syntax, such as differential object marking and indexing, possessive constructions and non-finite subordination. This has helped to establish common ground for further research into more intricate syntactic issues, using less conventional data types or methods (e.g., corpus-based and experimental research) and/or analysing data from languages that are still underdescribed. The papers in this special issue testify to this enlarged scope of current research in Uralic syntax.

In what follows, we give a brief overview of several topics in Uralic syntax which will provide some background for the papers of this special issue and summarize the results of recent research. We have tried to underscore features specific to Uralic, and identify typologically rare phenomena, as well as pointing out issues which are as yet insufficiently studied. The six topics selected are the following:

- differential object marking
- object agreement
- syntax of impersonal constructions
- syntax of minor parts of speech
- subordination and syntax of non-finite predication
- syntax of possessive constructions

This choice does not pretend to be objective, but merely reflects the point of view of the authors. For every topic we give only the most basic information on how the corresponding phenomena function in the Uralic languages. We do not claim to provide a full comparison of the Uralic languages, or to represent all of them equally. Special focus is laid on data from the minor Uralic languages.

The choice of these six topics defines the structure of the remainder of the paper. In sections 2–7, we discuss them in the order given above. The final section 8 presents our conclusions.

The data used in this paper were recorded by the authors directly from native speakers or taken from published sources (in the latter case, the source is explicitly indicated for every example). In most cases all

examples are cited as they are given in the sources, but sometimes we have made small changes in glossing to make it uniform and in keeping with the standards of this volume. In the examples from Markus & Rožanskij's (2017) grammar of Votic, a minor adaptation was made to the transcription.

## 2. Differential object marking

Differential object marking (DOM) is a phenomenon involving variable case marking of direct objects. There is no generally recognized definition of DOM, and the scope of this notion varies significantly across publications. DOM is sometimes taken to include both differential case marking and differential indexing, or agreement (Witzlack-Makarevich & Seržant 2018). In this subsection, however, we will focus on differential case marking, or flagging; object agreement will be discussed in section 3.

DOM is attested in most Uralic languages, see Bárány (forthcoming) for an overview. Uralic DOM is rather diverse on both functional and formal levels (Klumpp & Skribnik 2022: 1022). Although the parameters conditioning the choice of object marking in the Uralic languages (definiteness, animacy, referentiality, topicality, etc.)<sup>3</sup> are typical of DOM systems cross-linguistically, the combination and hierarchy of these parameters vary across languages and dialects. For instance, Serdobol'skaja & Toldova (2012) compare the DOM systems of Meadow Mari, Shoksha Mordvin, the Pechora dialect of Zyrian, and Beserman Udmurt, and conclude that all four varieties employ different algorithms to determine object marking.

On the formal level, the diversity of Uralic DOM comes primarily from the fact that it involves interaction between several categories: competition between cases is complicated by categories of possessivity (e.g. in Zyrian, Udmurt or Mansi), definiteness (e.g. in Mordvin), and number (e.g. in Finnic). The system of object marking can be further complicated by object indexing on the verb (in Mordvin, Ugric, and Samoyedic). As a result, we can observe competition between numerous object marking strategies in the same variety. For example, in Eastern

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3 See, for example, Klumpp (2014a), where many different features including focality and topicality are shown to influence object marking in Komi.

Mansi, Virtanen (2014) distinguishes between five variants of direct object encoding: (1) a nominative form and the subject conjugation for a focal object, (2) a possessive form and the subject conjugation for a possessed focal object, (3) a zero-marked form and the object conjugation for a highly topical object, (4) an accusative form and the object conjugation for a topical object, and (5) a possessive or accusative possessive form and the object conjugation for a possessed topical object.

The complexity of Uralic DOM systems is further increased due to formal parameters which interact with semantic considerations in the assignment of case to objects. In Samoyedic languages, the direct object in imperative constructions is usually in the nominative, in Finnic languages the negative form of the verb usually requires partitive marking on the object, etc. In some languages, nouns and pronouns behave differently with respect to DOM, see Klumpp (2012).

Thus, the synchronic and diachronic analysis of DOM in Uralic is valuable from a theoretical point of view. However, although a number of publications exist which describe DOM systems in particular Uralic languages, this topic is still crucially understudied. The existing publications sometimes offer contradictory accounts of the same language. For example, Siegl (2013: 155) discusses a grammar sketch (Tereščenko 1966) which claims that Forest Enets object marking distinguishes between definite and indefinite objects; it therefore contradicts the analysis proposed by Siegl, who finds no evidence of DOM in Forest Enets. Klumpp & Skribnik (2022: 1022) state that there is no DOM in Mari while Serdobolskaya (2015: 302) claims that Meadow Mari has DOM (see the detailed analysis of Meadow Mari data in Serdobol'skaja & Toldova 2012: 77–88). As usual, one of the problems is the absence of uniform terminology, which leads to low comparability between descriptions. For example, unmarked nominal objects in Mari can be considered either nominative (meaning that competition should be postulated between two case forms, nominative and accusative) or unmarked accusative (implying that we are dealing with two variants of the same case and the presence of DOM may be debatable), see the detailed discussion in Tužarov (1987: 109–122). In Finnic languages, some researchers distinguish an accusative case form of nouns and others do not (see discussion below). The same problem of establishing the case inventory also exists in Enets, see the discussion in Xanina & Šluinskij (2013).

Some problems arise from the different ways in which the notion of DOM is understood. In particular, DOM can be understood in the narrow sense (also called “asymmetric DOM”), whereby there is an opposition between marked and unmarked objects, cf. Iemmolo & Klumpp (2014: 272). In the wider sense, the notion of DOM also includes objects overtly marked with different cases (“symmetric DOM”). A different approach is proposed by Sinnemäki (2014: 284–286), who distinguishes between DOM in the narrow sense, which is conditioned by semantic and pragmatic factors (animacy, definiteness, information structure, tense and aspect of the verb, etc.), and a broader notion of restricted case marking, which refers to “overt case marking that is limited to a subset of objects regardless of the influencing factors”. Moreover, the syntactic structure of many Uralic languages is essentially different from that of languages where there is one special case dedicated to the subject and another dedicated to the object (nominative and accusative, respectively). This poses the question of what the direct object in a particular language is.<sup>4</sup> This question is especially relevant for the Finnic languages (see for example Rožanskij & Markus 2014 on Ingrian), but not exclusively. For example, Kozlov (2017) distinguishes three means of direct object marking in Moksha: the genitive of the definite declension, the nominative of the indefinite declension, and a postpositional group with the locative postposition *esə* ‘in’.

As an example, we will give a brief overview of Finnic DOM, one of the most complicated DOM systems, where up to four cases are in competition: partitive, nominative, genitive and pronominal accusative. As this is usually analysed using data from the major Finnic languages Finnish and Estonian, we will illustrate it with lesser-known data from Ingrian, a minor Finnic language.

The Finnic DOM system is based on two contrasts. The first contrast differentiates between so-called partial objects (marked with the partitive) and total objects (marked with one of the ‘total’ cases: nominative, genitive or pronominal accusative). The second contrast defines the choice between the cases used for total objects. The first contrast is based mostly on semantic and pragmatic rules which compete with each other and cannot be boiled down to a strict algorithm, whereas the

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4 This set of problems concerns the case marking of subject as well, see Huumo (2018) on Finnish, Lindström (2017) on Estonian, Heinsoo (1985) on Votic, etc.



second contrast is mostly governed by a number of strict and simple syntactic rules.

The number of parameters postulated to define the choice between total and partial objects varies significantly across studies (cf., for example, Kont 1963: 4; Tauli 1983: 45; Hakulinen et al. 2004: §§930–933; Tveite 2004: 22–35; Huumo 2010: 88; Metslang 2014). We identify four main parameters: aspectual characteristics of the clause, negative form of the predicate, totality of coverage of the object participant, and its referential status (see Rožanskij 2017).<sup>5</sup>

1. Aspectual characteristics. This parameter opposes completed vs uncompleted actions. The total object in (1a) indicates that the process was completed, and the action successfully took place. Example (1b) with the partial object informs us only about the process and says nothing about the result.

(1a) Soikkola Ingrian  
*hää*<sup>6</sup>     *teg-i*             *koi-n*  
 3SG     do-PST.3SG     house-GEN  
 ‘He has built a house.’

(1b) Soikkola Ingrian  
*hää*     *teg-i*             *koiti-a*  
 3SG     do-PST.3SG     house-PART  
 ‘He built/was building a house.’

Finnic verbs do not have a dedicated future tense form.<sup>7</sup> The present tense form of a transitive verb can refer to either present or future events depending on the case of the object. Example (2a) with a partial object

5 Cf. Laakso (2022: 250), where the following features of action which require the partitive object are listed: imperfective aspect, lower affectedness of the object, unbounded or unspecified quantity of the object, and negation.

6 Where examples are drawn from the existing linguistic literature, we write the initial letter in upper or lower case according to its presentation in the source. Lower case is used in examples from all other sources (including our own field notes).

7 In Finnic languages, there is a special verb *\*lee(ne)-* ‘to be (in the future)’ and constructions with auxiliary verbs, which express incomplete action in the future. For details see Norvik (2013).

describes present action and example (2b) with a total object refers to the future.

(2a) Soikkola Ingrian

*miä peže-n maa-da*  
 1SG wash.PRS-1SG floor-PART  
 ‘I mop/am mopping the floor.’

(2b) Soikkola Ingrian

*miä peže-n maa-n*  
 1SG wash.PRS-1SG floor-GEN  
 ‘I will mop the (entire) floor.’

## 2. Negative form of the predicate

One of the most unambiguous conditions requiring a partial object is the negative form of the predicate, cf. (3a) with a total object and the negative counterpart of the same sentence with a partial object (3b).

(3a) Soikkola Ingrian

*miä lu-i-n tämä-n kirja-n*  
 1SG read-PST-1SG this-GEN book-GEN  
 ‘I have read this book.’

(3b) Soikkola Ingrian

*miä e-n lukkee-nd tädä kirja-a*  
 1SG NEG-1SG read-PTCP.ACT this.PART book-PART  
 ‘I did not read this book.’

However, there are rare cases in the Finnic languages where the total object is attested even in negative contexts, see discussion of this topic in Arkad’ev (2017: 217–224). More data on the influence of negation on the case marking of objects can be found in Miestamo, Tamm & Wagner-Nagy (2015). Whether an occurrence of the partitive object is determined by the verbal form as such or by negative semantics and pragmatics is an interesting issue which, however, we do not discuss here.

### 3. Totality of coverage

In example (4a), the partial object refers to some undefined quantity of water. In (4b), the object is total, which means that the entire portion of water (e.g. in a glass) should be drunk.

(4a) Soikkola Ingrian

*jõõ vet-tä*  
 drink.IMP.2SG water-PART  
 ‘Drink (some) water!’

(4b) Soikkola Ingrian

*jõõ veži*  
 drink.IMP.2SG water(NOM)  
 ‘Drink (all) the water!’

### 4. Referential status

If the referential status of the object is low the partial object is used. Example (5a) implies that an undefined quantity of mushrooms (non-specific) was picked. Example (5b) has a total object and means that reference is being made to specific mushrooms that were picked.

(5a) Soikkola Ingrian

*hää korja-iž obokk-i-a*  
 3SG pick-PST.3SG mushroom-PL-PART  
 ‘He picked mushrooms.’ (non-specific)

(5b) Soikkola Ingrian

*hää korja-iž oboga-d*  
 3SG pick-PST.3SG mushroom-PL.NOM  
 ‘He picked mushrooms.’ (specific)

These basic principles compete with each other, and there are no universal rules which define which principle will dominate in a particular situation. The general principles of opposition between partial and total objects are the same for all Finnic languages, but every language has many specific features that make each DOM system unique.<sup>8</sup> For

8 It is worth mentioning that these features are not stable and are subject to change. See, for example, Metslang & Habicht (2023) on the development of the DOM system in written Estonian.

example, Estonian does not have pronominal accusative forms, and the partitive form of a personal pronoun is used in contexts such as (6a), where in Finnish the accusative form is preferable (6b).

(6a) Estonian

<i>nad</i>	<i>aja-si-d</i>	<i>meid</i>	<i>ära</i>
3PL	drive-PST-3PL	1PL.PART	away

‘They drove us away.’

(6b) Finnish

<i>he</i>	<i>ajo-i-vat</i>	<i>meidät</i>	<i>pois</i>
3PL	drive-PST-3PL	1PL.ACC	away

‘They drove us away.’

Lexical factors can also play a role. Some verbs tend to have a partial object, while other verbs are used with a total object, and this feature is language-dependent (see, for example, Lauranto 2017 on Finnish). In example (7a) from Votic, a partial object is used (the action is in the present tense). The sentence in (7b) has the same meaning but the object is total because the verb ‘see’ usually requires a total object in Finnish.

(7a) Vaipooli Votic, Luuditsa variety (Rožanskij 2017: 50)

<i>nüitt</i>	<i>tämä</i>	<i>näe-b</i>	<i>kas-tâ</i>	<i>tüttö-ä</i>
now	3SG	see-PRS.3SG	this-PART	girl-PART

‘Now he sees this girl.’

(7b) Finnish (Rožanskij 2017: 49)

<i>nyt</i>	<i>hän</i>	<i>näkee</i>	<i>tämä-n</i>	<i>tyttö-n</i>
now	3SG	see.PRS.3SG	this-GEN	girl-GEN

‘Now he sees this girl.’

The choice of case marking for a total object is governed by more formal syntactic principles.

1. A plural object requires the nominative except for the personal pronouns, which use the accusative (8a, 8b).

(8a) Soikkola Ingrian

<i>hää</i>	<i>ošt-i</i>	<i>kana-d</i>
3SG	buy-PST.3SG	hen-PL.NOM

‘He bought hens.’

## (8b) Soikkola Ingrian

*miä ajo-i-n heijed poiž*  
 1SG drive-PST-1SG 3PL.ACC away  
 ‘I drove them away.’

2. A singular object requires the nominative if it is the argument with the highest rank (i.e. when the nominative subject is missing), and the genitive in other situations. Thus, a nominative object is used in three constructions (all of which lack an overt nominative subject): imperative constructions (9a),<sup>9</sup> impersonal constructions (9b), and constructions featuring a modal verb without nominative subject plus lexical verb (9c).

In other cases, the genitive object is used (9d).

## (9a) Soikkola Ingrian

*ošša heppoin*  
 buy.IMP.2SG horse(NOM)  
 ‘Buy a horse!’

## (9b) Soikkola Ingrian

*tämä kodi teh-hää šelvää*  
 this house(NOM) do-IPS.PRS fast  
 ‘(They) will build this house fast.’

## (9c) Soikkola Ingrian

*piitä-ä vεejjä poiga oppii*  
 have\_to-PRS.3SG carry.INF child(NOM) school.ILL  
 ‘One needs to take the child to school.’

## (9d) Soikkola Ingrian

*hää öšt-i heppiže-n*  
 3SG buy-PST.3SG horse-GEN  
 ‘He bought a horse.’

9 However, in Livonian the genitive can be used in imperative constructions (Dailidēnaitē 2023: 14).

Thus, even at the level of general principles, leaving aside many nuances,<sup>10</sup> the system of Finnic DOM appears highly complex. It also provides a clear example of how terminological problems can make a system appear even more complex than it already is. In the Finnish linguistic tradition an accusative case is usually distinguished for nouns; however, the forms taken by this case are identical either to the genitive or to the nominative. We will not discuss all the problems arising from this approach here (cf. the more detailed analysis in Rožanskij 2017: 53–58) but point to several main issues.

First, the Finnish linguistic tradition developed from the European tradition, which was initially based on the analysis of classical Indo-European languages with the accusative case. If it is identified as having an accusative, Finnish begins to resemble a typical European language with nominative-accusative alignment. However, Volodin (2000) notes that the absence of the accusative can in fact be considered a dominant typological feature of Finnish (as well as other related languages).

Second, the introduction of the accusative for nouns makes Finnish poorly comparable with other Finnic languages in this domain. For example, in the Estonian tradition no accusative case is recognized.<sup>11</sup>

Third, there are syntactic arguments why the interpretation of a Finnish object as accusative instead of nominative is not appropriate (see, for example, Kiparsky 2001).

Fourth, as noted by Karlsson (1999: 91), “[t]he accusative is not really a case form proper but a collective name for certain cases used for the object (nominative, genitive and *-t* accusative).” Although Hakulinen et al. (2004: §925) distinguishes between the genitive, nominative, and pronominal accusative of total objects, even in contemporary publications the cover term “accusative” is often used without any explicit explanation (see, for example, Næss 2004: 1188; Kittilä, Laakso & Ylikoski 2022: 886). In fact, it is effectively used as an alternative way to refer to the total object in general (Vihman 2004: 44; Dailidėnaite 2023: 13).

10 As an example of such nuances, see Tamm (2014), who demonstrates a specific marking of deadjectival mass nouns in Estonian. Some specific features of DOM in minor Finnic languages are discussed in Rožanskij (2017).

11 Note that Finnish has special pronominal accusative forms *minut* ‘1SG.ACC’, *sinut* ‘2SG.ACC’, *hänet* ‘3SG.ACC’, *meidät* ‘1PL.ACC’, *teidät* ‘2PL.ACC’, *heidät* ‘3PL.ACC’, *kenet* ‘who.ACC’. Estonian does not have such forms, so even its pronominal system does not require the notion of an accusative case.

The following quotation from Oranen (2019: 263) can serve to illustrate the difficulties caused by the terminological confusion prevalent in this area: “Partial objects are marked by the partitive case, while total objects are marked by the nominative or accusative case in Finnish, or by the nominative or genitive case in Estonian.” Anyone who is unaware of the terminological problem discussed here will be left with the impression that Estonian and Finnish use different sets of cases in their DOM systems, when in fact they do not (excluding several accusative pronominal forms which exist in Finnish and are absent from Estonian).

Thus, Uralic DOM is a striking example of a phenomenon that requires further comprehensive study, including both descriptive analysis and the development of a coherent theoretical and terminological base.

### 3. Object agreement

In many Uralic languages, a finite verb form may encode not only the subject but also the object. This feature is represented in the Mordvin, Ugric, and Samoyedic languages, and it is believed to have existed in some form in Proto-Uralic (Janhunen 1982: 32). These languages are typically described as having an objective conjugation, i.e. a set of agreement markers used for encoding both object and subject at once, existing in opposition to a subjective conjugation, which encodes only the subject,<sup>12</sup> cf. (10a)–(10b) from Tundra Nenets.

(10a) Tundra Nenets (Nikolaeva 2014: 207)

<i>xarad-m</i>	<i>p'ūrŋa-d°m</i>
house-ACC	search-1SG

‘I am looking for a house.’ (non-specific)

(10b) Tundra Nenets (Nikolaeva 2014: 207)

<i>xarad-m</i>	<i>p'ūrŋa-w°</i>
house-ACC	search-1SG>SG.OBJ

‘I am looking for a house.’ (specific)

12 This does not imply that the subject and the object must be overtly expressed elsewhere in the clause. In this respect, the markers of subjective and objective conjugation should be called indexing rather than agreement markers, cf. Haspelmath (2013).

The languages in question differ with respect to which semantic features of the object are expressed by the objective conjugation markers, as thoroughly examined in Trosterud (2006) and summarized in Janda, Laakso & Metslang (2022) and Klumpp & Skribnik (2022: 1026). In some, the objective conjugation encodes the mere presence of an object in the situation; this group includes Hungarian (Janda, Laakso & Metslang 2022: 896–897) and the Southern Samoyedic languages Kamas and Selkup. The number of the object is encoded by the markers of objective conjugation in Ob-Ugric (see Nikolaeva 1999 on Khanty and Virtanen 2014 on Mansi) and in the Northern Samoyedic languages Nenets, Enets, and Nganasan (Tereščenko 1973: 187–192). The most highly elaborate systems are found in Mordvin, where the objective conjugation expresses both number and person of the object (Grünthal 2008; Bernhardt 2020: 30). Forms of the objective conjugation in Uralic are often poorly segmentable, and each combination of subject and object features can have a distinct agreement marker. As a result, a verbal paradigm can comprise many different inflectional suffixes. For instance, in Mordvin, in addition to the six forms found in the subjective conjugation, the various combinations of subject and object person and number yield 28 distinct indicative forms (cf. Hamari & Ajanki 2022: 408–409). In the Northern Samoyedic languages, which have a three-way number distinction, the indicative subjective conjugation includes 9 and the objective conjugation 27 forms, with subparadigms for singular, dual, and plural objects, cf. the paradigms in Tundra Nenets (Nikolaeva 2014: 79–80) and Nganasan (Wagner-Nagy 2019: 229–232).<sup>13</sup>

The objective conjugation in Uralic languages is not selected automatically by all transitive verbs – they may stand in either the objective or the subjective conjugation, cf. examples (10a, 10b) from Tundra Nenets above. Thus, from a typological perspective, these languages exhibit differential object indexing, which is one of the types of variable object encoding along with differential case marking (Iemmolo & Klumpp 2014; Witzlack-Makarevich & Seržant 2018). In some Uralic languages, differential case marking of the object coexists with objective

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13 In addition to subjective and objective conjugations, the Northern Samoyedic languages possess a series of so-called reflexive agreement markers, which are used with a lexically restricted subset of intransitive verbs, as well as with the inchoative and passive forms (see Nikolaeva 2014: 78–79, 224–227; Wagner-Nagy 2019: 233, 340–347).



conjugation, and in such cases the objective conjugation appears predominantly or exclusively when the object is marked (see, e.g., Virtanen 2014: 411 on Eastern Mansi and Bernhardt 2020: 30 on Mordvin).

Traditionally, objective conjugation in many of the Uralic languages is called definite (as opposed to indefinite subjective conjugation) and its use has been linked to object definiteness, cf. Grünthal (2008) on Erzya. Some accounts, however, suggest that at least in some of the Uralic languages the use of objective conjugation cannot be explained by object definiteness alone (see Xanina & Šluinskij 2015 on Enets) and that this phenomenon pertains to the domain of information structure rather than the semantic category of definiteness (see Klumpp & Skribnik 2022: 1026–1028 for an overview). In particular, in a seminal paper on object agreement in Khanty, Nikolaeva (2001) argues that the objective conjugation is used for objects with the specific information status of secondary topic, which is a previously activated participant such that the clause featuring the objective conjugation describes the relationship between it and the subject (Nikolaeva 2001: 26). In Hungarian and the Samoyedic languages, the objective conjugation is also restricted in terms of the person of the object: it cannot be used with 1st and 2nd person objects, see É. Kiss (2013) for an overview and a possible explanation. In Mordvin, the conjugation type interacts with the aspectuality of the clause in that when the object appears in the genitive, the objective conjugation is used in perfective clauses, and the subjective conjugation in imperfective clauses; however, cognition and perception verbs are exempt from this generalization, and with them it is the identifiability of the object that conditions the choice of conjugation type (Bernhardt 2020: 30).

Thus, although it is generally accepted that the motivation for the use of the objective agreement lies primarily in the definiteness and/or the discourse-pragmatic status of the object, a full and more precise picture of this phenomenon in Uralic is yet to be established. In addition, since the presence of an objective conjugation characterizes a number of branches of Uralic (Mordvin, Ugric, Samoyedic), they can be used for a close-up comparison of the factors conditioning object agreement in a group of closely related languages, possibly contributing to our general understanding of the diachronic development of object agreement systems cross-linguistically.

#### 4. Syntax of impersonal constructions

Constructions without a referential subject are widespread cross-linguistically. They can be of various formal types: the subject can be dropped, a non-referential human noun or a pronoun can be used as a syntactic subject, etc. (see, for example, Siewierska 2011: 58–61, and for a typology based on a broader definition of impersonals Malchukov & Ogawa 2011). Much rarer are situations where a language has dedicated verbal forms for impersonal constructions (i.e. there is a set of forms with special suffix(es) whose main function is to express impersonality). Such forms exist in the Finnic languages (except Livonian),<sup>14</sup> see, for example, (11).

- (11) Soikkola Ingrian
- |             |                |             |                 |
|-------------|----------------|-------------|-----------------|
| <i>nüid</i> | <i>ode-daa</i> | <i>kaig</i> | <i>oboga-d</i>  |
| now         | take-IPS.PRS   | all         | mushroom-PL.NOM |
- ‘Nowadays (they) pick all (kinds of) mushrooms.’

The status of such forms varies across the Finnic languages:

(a) they can preserve their original impersonal status and be opposed to personal forms (as in Estonian),

(b) they can replace 3Pl personal forms, as in Vaipooli Votic, where in all sentences with a 3Pl subject (nominal or pronominal), morphologically impersonal forms are used instead of the original 3Pl personal forms,<sup>15</sup> cf. the impersonal sentence (12) with the personal (13), or

(c) they demonstrate variation with personal forms (as in Ingrian or Veps, where in sentences with a 3Pl subject either personal or

14 Similar forms are also attested in Skolt Saami (see Feist 2015: 106, 200–216; Juutinen & Ylikoski 2019).

15 In fact, the situation with impersonal forms in Vaipooli Votic of the 21st century is more complicated with respect to analytic negative forms. In the negative present tense, the replacement of personal by impersonal forms did not take place, and the personal form is preserved: *nämäd eväd too* 3PL NEG.3PL come.CNG ‘They do not come’. Meanwhile, in the negative past tense we observe a contamination of forms, whereby the negative auxiliary comes from the personal paradigm and the passive participle from the impersonal paradigm, cf. contemporary *nämäd eväd tul-tu* 3PL NEG.3PL come-PTCP.PASS ‘They did not come’ with the more archaic *nämäd ei tul-tu* 3PL NEG.3SG come-PTCP.PASS (where the regular replacement took place and the whole verbal form is impersonal) and with obsolete personal form *nämäd eväd tul-lu* 3PL NEG.3PL come-PTCP.ACT.

impersonal forms can appear depending on the particular variety, idiolect or occurrence).<sup>16</sup>

- (12) Vaipooli Votic, Luuditsa variety (Markus & Rožanskij 2017: 124)

<i>no</i>	<i>aje-tti</i>	<i>tämä</i>	<i>seeltə</i>	<i>pojz</i>	<i>ahjo</i>
well	drive-IPS.PST	3SG	from_there	away	stove.GEN
<i>pältə</i>					
from.above					

‘Well, he was driven away from there, off the stove.’

- (13) Vaipooli Votic, Jögöperä variety (Markus & Rožanskij 2017: 522)

<i>hüü</i>	<i>mejje-d</i>	<i>aje-tti</i>	<i>pojz</i>
3PL	1PL-ACC	drive-IPS.PST	away

‘They drove us away.’

There are at least two issues concerning the impersonal that are interesting from the syntactic point of view. The first is the relation between impersonal and passive constructions. This problem has been addressed by many researchers, and the question of whether the analysis of impersonal constructions as passives is justified has been widely discussed. For example, Blevins (2003) draws a strict distinction between passive constructions of the German type, regarded as a result of relation-changing “passivization”, and the Finnic impersonal construction, considered to result from relation-preserving “impersonalization”. This approach is challenged by Manninen & Hiietam (2005), who conclude that impersonal constructions share many features with passives. The problem of distinguishing between these two types of constructions is complicated by homonymy. For example, (14) can be analysed in two ways. First, it can be viewed as an instance of the impersonal perfect construction. In this construction, the verbal form consists of the auxiliary (the present tense of the verb ‘to be’ in the 3rd person singular form) and the passive participle of the lexical verb (unlike in personal constructions, where in the perfect tenses the active participle is used instead). *Maja* ‘house’ is the object in the nominative (see section 2). Second, this construction can be considered a stative passive in the present tense where *maja*

<sup>16</sup> In colloquial Finnish, the impersonal forms replace the 1PI personal forms (Karlsson 1999: 175; Lees 2015: 171), but this is not attested in any other Finnic language.

‘house’ is the subject, and *on* ‘be.PRS.3SG’ is an auxiliary that agrees with the subject in person and number.

(14) Estonian

<i>Maja</i>	<i>on</i>	<i>juba</i>	<i>ehita-tud</i>
house	be.PRS.3SG	already	build-PTCP.PASS

‘The house is already built.’

The same type of homonymy appears if the auxiliary is in the past tense: in this case we are dealing with the pluperfect of the impersonal, or with the stative passive in the past tense.

Such homonymy does not arise if the verbal form has a different person or number (since in this case it cannot be analysed as an impersonal construction). However, the 3rd person is the most frequent and sometimes the distinction between the 3rd singular and 3rd plural forms of the present tense auxiliary is lost. In particular, this contrast is completely lost in Estonian and partly lost in some other languages, e.g. in Votic and Ingrian. Thus, homonymy between impersonal and passive cannot be considered a rare phenomenon.

As often happens, an additional challenge comes from the existing terminology. In traditional studies on Finnic the impersonal forms are often called “passive forms”.<sup>17</sup> As a result, in many grammars impersonal and stative passive are not distinguished, and it is impossible to understand how each of these constructions functions in a particular language. An additional challenge comes from the “impersonalized passive” constructions observed in some Finnic languages (see examples for Estonian in Vihman 2002: 7 and for Finnish in Halulinen et al. 2004: §1292). Such constructions demonstrate the intersection of impersonal and passive paradigms.

The problem of the impersonal vs. passive distinction is analysed on the basis of Estonian and Veps material in Oskolskaia (2024), where the case of the object in negative sentences is used as an indicator of the type of construction involved.

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17 Cf.: “As a result of Latin linguistic scholarship, however, the term “passive” has been systematically misapplied to a class of impersonal constructions, especially in Balto-Finnic and Balto-Slavic” (Sansò 2006: 269). See also the discussion of terminology in Lees (2015: 169).

The second issue concerns relations between impersonal and personal constructions. In Finnic varieties where impersonal forms appear in personal contexts, competition is observed between two factors. On the one hand, the impersonal verbal form in impersonal constructions requires nominative case on the total object because impersonal constructions do not have a subject (see section 2 on differential marking of total objects in Finnic). This association between the verbal form and the case of the object explains why the nominative object is attested in 3PL personal constructions where the impersonal verbal forms replaced the original personal forms, in particular in Vaipooli Votic (15), Lower Luga Ingrian, Karelian, Livvi, some Veps varieties (see Lees 2015: 171–173; Rozhanskij 2017: 65–66), and sporadically in Soikkola Ingrian. In colloquial Finnish, where the impersonal is attested in 1PL function (cf. footnote 16), the total object is also nominative (Lees 2015: 171).

- (15) Vaipooli Votic, Luuditsa variety (Markus & Rožanskij 2017: 170)
- |              |               |            |             |
|--------------|---------------|------------|-------------|
| <i>nämäd</i> | <i>teh-ti</i> | <i>uus</i> | <i>koto</i> |
| 3PL          | do-IPS.PST    | new(NOM)   | house(NOM)  |
- ‘They built a new house.’

On the other hand, such constructions are not impersonal any longer (despite the impersonal verbal form, they have an overt subject) and genitive marking of the object would be expected here for syntactic reasons (personal constructions with a subject require a genitive singular object, see section 2). This factor prevails in some Veps varieties (16).

- (16) Veps, Central dialect (Zaiceva & Mullenon 1969: 9)
- |                  |               |          |               |                 |
|------------------|---------------|----------|---------------|-----------------|
| <i>mecníka-d</i> | <i>ot-tas</i> | <i>i</i> | <i>ńeçę-n</i> | <i>końđja-n</i> |
| hunter-PL.NOM    | take-IPS.PRS  | and      | this-GEN      | bear-GEN        |
- amp-tas*  
shoot-IPS.PRS
- ‘The hunters (will) go ahead and shoot this bear dead.’

The use of the genitive in such constructions has influenced impersonal constructions proper, which do not have a subject, and as a result, genitive marking is attested in them too (17).

- (17) Veps, Central dialect (Zaiceva & Mullanen 1969: 9)

*ńecę-n      padalı-ń      eduupęi      vő-das*  
 this-GEN    carrion-GEN    in\_advance    carry-IPS.PRS  
 ‘This carrion is carried away in advance.’

The first of these two strategies, where a nominative object is used in sentences with a subject and an impersonal form of the verb, affects the hierarchical object marking system. Nominative singular is no longer a dedicated form characterizing the highest-ranked argument (see section 2), because a nominative singular object can appear in a sentence with a subject (15).

The question which arises from the two issues above and has not yet been studied sufficiently concerns the status of the argument in such impersonal constructions. Is this argument really close to being a prototypical object (as it is traditionally considered) or has it acquired some subject features? For example, the typical object follows the predicate, while in impersonal constructions it often precedes the predicate, as in (18).

- (18) Vaipooli Votic, Jõgõperä variety (Markus & Rožanskij 2017: 40)

*siiz    mej-t    lahsij-t    saate-tti    škoulu-se*  
 then 1PL-PART    child.PL-PART    send-IPS.PST(=PST.3PL)    school-ILL  
 ‘Then (they) send us children to school’.

Although dedicated impersonal forms are observed only in Finnic languages, other Uralic languages have various types of constructions with impersonal meaning (Klumpp & Skribnik 2022: 1028–1029). These constructions are of interest to syntacticians, see, for example, F. Gulyás & Speshilova (2014) and F. Gulyás (2022) on Udmurt and other Permic languages. In Finnic, there is also a rather wide spectrum of means (besides impersonal verbal forms) for expressing impersonality,<sup>18</sup> see Helasvuo & Vilkuña (2008) on Finnish.

<sup>18</sup> In particular, constructions with non-canonical subjects (39–41) can also be considered impersonal in the broad sense of this term.

## 5. Syntax of minor parts of speech

Most papers dedicated to Uralic syntax focus on the main morphological classes of words: verbs, nouns, adjectives, and adverbs. The syntax of other parts of speech is crucially understudied in syntactic descriptions. Parts of speech which are traditionally regarded as peripheral and often go unmentioned in grammars are in the worst situation. This is the case, for example, with particles. Grammars of Uralic languages (especially the minor ones) usually ignore particles, or simply list those found in the language concerned without providing any analysis. At best a short description of their meaning is given. The only general research on Uralic particles is a chapter in Majtinskaja's (1982) monograph on function words. More recent publications focus on particles in a particular language (e.g. Erina 1997 for the Mordvin languages) or on a particular class of particles (e.g. Miestamo 2011 on polar interrogatives). In most cases, the syntax of particles is poorly described. For example, their syntactic classification takes up only two pages in Majtinskaja (1982: 120–122), and Erina (1997) does not contain a special chapter on syntax; instead, syntactic information is distributed sporadically over the various chapters and is therefore fragmentary. However, the accurate description of particles requires a comprehensive analysis of their syntax and meaning, because the functions of particles are largely determined by their syntactic properties.<sup>19</sup>

Consider, for example, the particle *vot* in the Votic language. This particle was borrowed from Russian and is found widely in the documented usage of the last Votic speakers. Example (19) contains two occurrences of *vot*.

(19) Vaipooli Votic, Luuditsa variety (Markus & Rožanskij 2017: 118–119)

<i>i</i>	<b><i>vot</i></b>	<i>f'ed'a</i>	<i>dädə</i>		
and	PTCL	Fedya	uncle		
<i>a</i>	<i>prāznikkə</i>	<i>əl-i</i>	<i>sīderi</i>	<i>ivo-ллə</i>	
and	feast	be-PST.3SG	Sidor.GEN	Ivan-ADE	
<i>i</i>	<b><i>vot</i></b>	<i>mehij</i>	<i>əl-i</i>	<i>pall'o</i>	<i>najsij</i>
and	PTCL	man.PL.PART	be-PST.3SG	many	woman.PL.PART

19 There are, however, descriptions where the syntax of a particular particle or a group of particles is analysed thoroughly. See, for example, Surányi (2009) on verbal particles in Hungarian and Holmberg (2014) on the Finnish question particle *-ko*.

*pal'lo vättši-ä el-i vapšše pal'lo*  
 many people-PART be-PST.3SG in\_general many  
 ‘And uncle Fedya – the feast was at Ivan Sidorov’s place – and there  
 were lots of men, lots of women, in general lots of people...’

*Vot* appears after the conjunction *i* ‘and’ at the beginning of the clause and is a marker of a new discourse unit. At the beginning of the story, the narrator describes the general context (there was a feast in the village) and then switches to the main character in the narrative (uncle Fedya). This switch is marked with the particle *vot*. Then the narrator remembers that he has omitted an important detail (where the celebration happened) and makes the necessary comment to rectify this. After that he switches to the description of the feast in this particular place and again marks this switch with the particle *vot*. It is typical for *vot* to accompany the conjunction *i* ‘and’ or the adverb *siz* ‘then’ in this function.

In example (20) from Luuditsa Votic, the same particle occurs at the end of the sentence and has a completely different function – it serves as a logical ‘full stop’ marking the end of a discourse unit.

- (20) Vaipooli Votic, Luuditsa variety (Markus & Rožanskiy 2017: 165–166)
- |                |                |               |              |            |               |                |
|----------------|----------------|---------------|--------------|------------|---------------|----------------|
| <i>no</i>      | <i>siz</i>     | <i>jo</i>     | <i>tul-i</i> | <i>tši</i> | <i>mehell</i> | <i>men-i-n</i> |
| PTCL           | then           | already       | come-PST.3SG | PTCL       | married       | go-PST-1SG     |
| <i>mehell</i>  | <i>men-i-n</i> |               |              |            |               |                |
| married        | go-PST-1SG     |               |              |            |               |                |
| <i>mehe-ka</i> | <i>keimēD</i>  | <i>las-sə</i> | <i>el-i</i>  | <i>vot</i> |               |                |
| man.GEN-COM    | three          | child-PART    | be-PST.3SG   | PTCL       |               |                |
- ‘Well, later the time has come – I got married, got married, with my husband I had three children, so it is.’

Another example can be found in Markus (2024), an article analysing the Ingrian particles *no* and *nu*. The function of these particles differs depending on their syntactic position – preclausal or clause-internal.

Recently there has been an increase of interest in Uralic particles, and it can be hoped that the next few years will see extensive research on this topic. In particular, a new project ‘The grammar of discourse particles in Uralic’ led by Gerson Klumpp was started at the University of Tartu in 2021 (DiPU 2024).

The most important factor favouring further studies on particles is the general recognition of particles as a separate part of speech. The situation is much worse for those classes of words that have not traditionally



been recognized in Uralic grammars. One such class is the ideophones,<sup>20</sup> which are critically understudied, especially from the syntactic point of view (among rare exceptions, see, for example, Klumpp 2014b on Komi). The problem comes primarily from the tradition of taking Russian grammar as a model for grammars of minor Uralic languages (see Klumpp, Mazzitelli & Rozhanskiy 2018). In Russian there are no ideophones (at least as a separate class of words), but they exist in many Uralic languages. In Uralic grammars, ideophones may find themselves labelled as “onomatopoeic words”, “imitative words”, etc., or else distributed over more “traditional” classes, e.g. adverbs or interjections. The grammatical properties of ideophones can be strikingly different across Uralic languages. This class of words can be distinguished by several criteria belonging to different linguistic levels (see the more detailed description in Rozhanskiy 2018: 179–180):

- specific phonetic structure,
- specific meaning,
- paronymic clustering,
- specific syntactic behaviour,
- restricted usage depending on a particular genre,
- specific prosodic marking.

Syntactic criteria cannot be ignored. For example, in Rožanskij (2002: 90–91), the syntactic position of the word is used to distinguish ideophones from adverbs in Meadow Mari: the latter often occupy clause-initial position (21) while ideophones typically appear before the verb (22).

(21) Meadow Mari, Sary Torjal variety (Rožanskij 2002: 91)

<i>žapən-žapən</i>	<i>məj</i>	<i>ačaməm</i>	<i>šarnaltem</i>
sometimes	1SG	father.POSS.1SG.ACC	remember.PRS.1SG

‘Sometimes I remember my father.’

(22) Meadow Mari, Sary Torjal variety (Rožanskij 2002: 91)

<i>maska</i>	<i>səptər-səptər</i>	<i>košteš</i>
bear	IDEO	walk.PRS.3SG

‘The bear walks awkwardly.’

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20 See, for example, Voeltz & Kilian-Hatz (2001) and Akita & Dingemanse (2019) on this notion.

A specific phenomenon which still requires a thorough analysis and has not been studied for the Uralic languages is the syntactic relationship between ideophones and auxiliary verbs. This relation is very close: in some publications on Komi, for example, the ideophone and auxiliary are analysed together as comprising a compound verb. In particular, Fejes (2004: 12) gives a large list of verbs such as *ruč-račmunnj* ‘crack’, where the meaning of the first constituent, i.e. *ruč-rač*, is defined as ‘act of cracking’ and *munnj* means ‘go’. In fact, the diversity of morphosyntactic structure of ideophonic constructions in Komi is very high, and the auxiliary verb can be combined with both a bare ideophonic root (23) and an ideophone with verbal inflections (24). This phenomenon is not widespread cross-linguistically.

- (23) Komi, Pechora dialect, Eremeevo variety (Rozhanskiy 2018: 191)

<i>oš</i>	<b><i>ruč-rač</i></b>	<b><i>mun-i-s</i></b>
bear	IDEO	go-PST1-3SG

‘A bear passed by with crackling.’

- (24) Komi, Pechora dialect, Eremeevo variety (Rozhanskiy 2018: 191)

<i>peće</i>	<i>luntjɹ</i>	<b><i>brutkis-brotkis</i></b>	<b><i>kjɹ-ɛ</i></b>
grandmother	whole_day	IDEO(PST1.3SG) <sup>21</sup>	hear-PRS.3SG

<i>čel'ad'</i>	<i>vjɹɛ</i>
children	on

‘Grandmother grumbled at the children the whole day.’

Even some of the classes of words traditionally mentioned in grammars (e.g. numerals) are not usually analysed from a syntactic point of view. In the current volume, there are two papers which focus on the syntax of particular parts of speech. Huumo (2024) analyses the development of case marking in some adpositional constructions (mostly based on Finnish data), and Rozhanskiy (2024) examines the syntactic properties of the numeral phrase in Ingrian.

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21 The morphological parsing of the ideophone is problematic here, see discussion in Rozhanskiy (2018: 187–190).

## 6. Subordination and syntax of non-finite predication

The Uralic languages have a vast inventory of non-finite verbal forms – infinitives, participles, converbs, and action nominals. For instance, in Mari there are two infinitives, four participles and up to seven converbs (Alhoniemi 1993: 133–140). For Skolt Saami, Feist (2015: 206) describes 13 non-finite forms: 8 participles (action, present, past, passive, progressive, temporal, instrumental, and abessive), 4 connegatives (converbs), and an infinitive. In Finnic languages, there are two infinitives bearing the suffixes *\*tA* and *\*mA*, which can also take some nominal case endings, resulting in a number of non-finite forms with different functions and grammatical properties (see discussion of terminology and examples in Laakso 2022: 248; Ylikoski 2022: 936–937, 944).

As noted by Skribnik (2022: 996), traditional Uralic grammaticography exaggerated the role of finite strategies in subordination, while non-finite subordinate clauses were written off as clausal equivalents of adjectives, nouns and adverbs. Thus, in traditional Uralic grammars, the description of non-finite subordination is typically limited to providing an inventory of non-finite forms with basic information on their meaning, whereas a systematic description of clause-combining that provides an analysis of its various semantic, syntactic and discourse-pragmatic parameters is often lacking.

Uralic languages appear to be relatively diverse in terms of their preferred clause-combining strategies. This diversity has a pronounced areal pattern of distribution, with a general east-to-west cline and language groupings that vary in scale. One of the areal aspects concerns the basic opposition between finite and non-finite subordination. Finite subordinate clauses and the use of conjunctions are most widespread in the western part of the Uralic-speaking area (Shagal 2023b). É. Kiss (2023) suggests that the shift from non-finite to finite subordination correlates with the drift from SOV to SVO word order which took place in the Indo-European environment. The conjunctions and particles used in finite subordinate clauses may be the result of direct borrowing, calquing or parallel development (Skribnik 2022: 997–999). In the current volume, finite subordination strategies are discussed in the papers by Ovsjannikova (2024) and Laury, Pajusalu & Helasvuo (2024). Ovsjannikova reconstructs a possible diachronic development for the Forest Enets conditional conjunction *mab(ut)*. Laury, Pajusalu &

Helasvuo (2024) analyse the syntactic and pragmatic features of relative clauses in Estonian and Finnish spoken discourse.

In this section we will focus mainly on non-finite forms. As many of the Uralic non-finite forms are polyfunctional and there is some variation in the way individual forms are treated, further discussion will be structured in terms of the syntactic functions carried out by these forms, namely adnominal modification, complementation, and adverbial clause formation.

Uralic non-finite forms used for **adnominal modification** are typically labelled as participles in grammatical descriptions. Semantically, participial paradigms in individual languages are usually organized along the semantic parameters of TAM and polarity and the syntactic parameter of orientation (Shagal 2018, 2023a). The orientation of a participle determines the range of syntactic positions it is able to relativize. The major distinction here is between inherently and contextually oriented participles: inherently oriented participles relativize only one syntactic position, whereas contextually oriented participles can relativize a wide range of syntactic positions. For instance, in Meadow Mari, the active participle is inherently oriented, as it can relativize only the subject position (25), and the passive participle is contextually oriented, since it is able to relativize a number of non-subject positions (Brykina & Aralova 2012), in particular a locative oblique object (26).

(25) Meadow Mari (Brykina & Aralova 2012: 480)

<i>Ĉ'üč'kadən</i>	<i>č'erlan-əše</i>	<i>rveze</i>	<i>šuko</i>	<i>urok-əm</i>
often	get_ill-PTCP.ACT	boy	many	lesson-ACC
<i>kod-a</i>				
miss-PRS.3SG				

‘The boy who often gets ill misses many classes.’

(26) Meadow Mari (Brykina & Aralova 2012: 482)

<i>oksa</i>	<i>kij-əme</i>	<i>škaf</i>
money	lie-PTCP.PASS <sup>22</sup>	closet

‘the closet where the money lies’

Orientation of participles is one of the aspects of Uralic clause-combining that show a clear areal pattern (Shagal 2018). Inherently

22 In the cited publication, this form is glossed as a nominalizer.

oriented participles are most common in the westernmost Uralic languages, namely Finnic, due to contacts with Baltic (Ylikoski 2022: 941), and Hungarian. The Uralic languages of Siberia mostly have contextually oriented participles, and this feature is characteristic of the languages of the area in general (Pakendorf 2012). Finally, there is an intermediate zone, which contains the Permic and Mari languages, where both inherent and contextually oriented participles are represented (Brykina & Aralova 2012; Shagal 2018).

A feature common to participial systems across the Uralic languages is the existence of dedicated negative participles (Shagal 2018: 77–79; Ylikoski 2022: 942, 945–946). The markers used to form these participles often coincide with or contain the caritive (also called abessive) affix used to form nominal forms meaning ‘without X’, cf. Udmurt *ei-ic* (*pajfur*) ‘(animal) that is eating’, *ei-icitem* (*pajfur*) ‘(animal) that is not eating’, and the caritive form *anaj-tem* ‘motherless’ (Ylikoski 2022: 940, 942). The paradigms of negative participles are typically not as elaborated as those of affirmative participles, so that the same negative participle can serve as a negative counterpart of a whole array of affirmative participles. For instance, even in languages with predominantly inherently oriented participles, negative participles have contextual orientation, cf. the Finnish examples in Shagal (2018: 77).

In the domain of **clausal complementation**, it is cross-linguistically common for a language to possess several encoding strategies distributed according to the meaning of the construction and the type of temporal reference involved, see Noonan (2007) for a typological overview. The analysis of Finnic complementation markers by Kehayov (2016: 452–470) shows that besides a number of complementizers used in finite subordinate clauses, there are different non-finite complementation strategies: *A/DA*-infinitive, *MA*-infinitive, participles, and case forms of action nominals. The distribution of these strategies may depend both on the semantic type of the matrix predicate and on the verb used in the complement clause. Some of these strategies are typologically unusual, e.g., in Finnic, participles are the main non-finite complementation device.<sup>23</sup>

23 Although in Kehayov (2016: 468) this statement is made for Finnic languages in general, it primarily concerns Finnish and Estonian, whereas in some languages (e.g. contemporary Votic and Ingrian), participles are not usually used in complementation.

The competition between Finnic infinitives (*A/DA*-infinitive vs *MA*-infinitive, which is also often labelled the supine) creates a rather diverse and blurred picture across the Finnic languages because the semantic type of the matrix verb is usually not sufficient to define the choice of the infinitive, cf., for example, Vaipooli Votic, where the verb *anika* ‘start’ requires the *A/DA*-infinitive, while the verb *lepetta* ‘finish’ allows variation between the infinitives (Markus & Rožanskiy 2017: 585). The verb in the subordinate clause can also define the choice of non-finite form. For example, although in Ingrian the verb *tahtoa* ‘want’ generally requires the *A/DA*-infinitive, the *MA*-infinitive is preferable in the complement clause in (27). This is a result of the conventionalization of an elliptical version of *I want to go to sleep* where the verb *männä* ‘go’ (which requires the *ma*-infinitive) is omitted.

- (27) Soikkola Ingrian  
*miä taho-n makkaa-maa (~ maa-da)*  
 1SG want.PRS-1SG sleep-SPN (~ sleep-INF)  
 ‘I want to sleep.’

In the domain of **adverbial clauses**, the two major non-finite strategies are converbs and postpositional constructions with action nominals,<sup>24</sup> the latter being a widespread source of grammaticalization for the former. As is typologically common for adverbial clauses, clauses with converbs and postpositional constructions with action nominals serve to express various meanings (temporal, purpose, result, substitution, etc., see Ylikoski 2022: 942–945). As shown by Muravyev (2018: 105) for Northern Khanty, Izhma Komi and Moksha, the distribution of converbial forms can also be determined by their discourse-pragmatic properties. In particular, the choice between simultaneity converbs in these languages depends on whether the event they describe is given or new.

Postpositional constructions featuring action nominals are especially typical of the central and easternmost Uralic languages, where they play a major role in adverbial subordination (Skribnik 2022: 1006; Ylikoski 2022: 943). The spread of postpositional constructions with

24 However, other strategies are also possible, see, for instance, examples of Nganasan manner adverbial clauses with infinitives (Wagner-Nagy 2019: 446).

action nominals also allows for the expression of various meanings, in particular evidentiality and mirativity (Skribnik 2022: 1016). A detailed analysis of their functions, their syntactic structure (including agreement with the subject), and the process of their grammaticalization is a subject for future research in most Uralic languages.

Generally, both descriptive research and comparative studies of Uralic clause-combining are greatly complicated by the existence of polyfunctional non-finites labelled differently from language to language, and even within a single language according to the different functions they fulfil (see the discussion of this problem in a wider typological perspective in Shagal, Rudnev & Volkova 2022). In particular, problems of this kind often arise where the use of the same non-finite form is widely attested both for adnominal modification and in complement clauses (see the discussion in Serdobol'skaja et al. 2012: 407–409). Linguists should take greater care to distinguish between form and function more consistently, so as to facilitate the analysis of the polysemy models of non-finite markers across Uralic.<sup>25</sup>

The diversity of the subordination strategies also comes from a rich system of cases observed in most Uralic languages. In non-finite clauses, which exist across the family but dominate in eastern Uralic languages in particular, we can observe diverse case marking of both non-finites and subjects in dependent clauses, cf. (28) with the non-finite form in the accusative and the subject in the ablative case, (29) with the non-finite form in the dative case, and (30) with the inessive form of the infinitive.

(28) Udmurt (Georgieva 2016: 80)

<i>Soos</i>	[( <i>m̄inešt̄im</i> )	<i>l̄ikt-em-me</i> ]	<i>viť-i-z̄j</i>
They	(1SG.ABL)	come-NF-1SG.ACC	wait-PST-3PL

‘They were waiting for me to come.’

(29) Tundra Nenets (Nikolaeva 2014: 346)

<i>m̄anc̄ya-waq</i>	<i>s̄əwa-w̄ona</i>	<i>yolc'e-wa-n̄h</i>	<i>yēn̄ə̄-waq</i>
work-ACC.1PL	good-PROL	finish-IMPF.INF-DAT	hope-1PL

‘We are hoping to finish our work well.’

25 See Dékány and Georgieva (2020), where an attempt is made to solve the participle-nominalization polysemy problem.

- (30) Estonian (Erelt 2003: 123)

*Jõu-de-s*      *mõtte-te-ga*      *nii*      *kaugele,*      *tund-is*  
 reach-INF-INE    thought-PL-COM    so      far      feel-PST.3SG  
*ta*      *piinlikkus-t*  
 3SG      embarrassment-PART  
 ‘Having reached that far in his thoughts he felt embarrassed.’

The Uralic clause-combining system has been subject to recent contact-induced changes, which affect non-finite as well as finite constructions. First of all, this concerns some linking elements borrowed from Russian (Skribnik 2022: 998). For example, Wagner-Nagy (2019: 444–445) gives the example of the Russian linking element *štobi* ‘in order to’, which appears in the Nganasan sentence in (31) featuring the supine verbal form.

- (31) Nganasan (Wagner-Nagy 2019: 445)

*tahariaa*      *kobtua*      *i-hü-tü,*  
 now      girl      be-COND-OBL.POSS3SG  
*ni-s'iđi-či*           *kiirüə-btia-li-?*      *əmanä*  
 NEG.AUX-FUT-3SG.PL.OBC      ring-ATTN-TR-CNG      this  
*luu-mtu*      *kəmia-ʔsutə*      *tu-u-ču*  
 clothes-ACC.POSS3SG      take-FUT.3SG      fire-EP-ACC.PL.POSS3SG  
*kəmia-ʔsutə*      {*štobi*      *ni-niagə-tij*  
 take-FUT.3SG      in\_order.R      NEG.AUX-SPN-OBL.POSS3PL  
*səjbu-ʔ*  
 sound-CNG  
 ‘A girl will hold her parka and fire steel in order not to produce any noise.’

Kotcheva & Rieβler (2016: 522) discuss the Skolt Saami example (32) from Feist (2010), where the borrowed *that*-type complementizer *što* is combined with the *if*-complementizer *jos* introducing a finite dependent clause.

- (32) Skolt Saami (Feist 2010: 348)

*jïðm*      *á'tte*      *mon*      *ni*      *kõðjjče*      *što*  
 NEG.1SG    then      1SG.NOM    even      ask.NEG:COND    COMP  
*jos*      *mon*      *teâđčem*      *le'ččem*      *veär*  
 if      1SG.NOM      know.COND.1SG      be.COND.1SG      food.SG.ACC  
*raajjâm*      *ouddâl*  
 prepare.PST.PTCP      before  
 ‘I wouldn’t even ask, if I knew, if I had prepared food before.’



It should be noted that functions of the borrowed linking element *što* in the recipient language can be wider than in the donor language. In examples (33, 34) from Soikkola Ingrian, we would rather expect *štobj* ‘in order to’ and *patamušto* ‘because’ respectively, as *što* is not possible in similar contexts in the donor language (Russian).

(33) Soikkola Ingrian

<i>anġtaa</i>	<i>vet-tä</i>	<i>što</i>	<i>valla-a</i>
give.PRS.3SG	water-PART	COMP	pour-INF
‘(He) gives water to pour.’			

(34) Soikkola Ingrian

<i>piġtää</i>	<i>što</i>	<i>brigada</i>	<i>tullo</i>
have.to.PRS.3SG	COMP	brigade	come.PRS.3SG
<i>i</i>	<i>tahtoo</i>	<i>šġö-vvä</i>	
and	want.PRS.3SG	eat-INF	
‘It is necessary because the brigade is coming and wants to eat’.			

## 7. Syntax of possessive constructions

Cross-linguistically, possession can be expressed by various means, lexical, morphological and syntactic (Aikhenvald 2013), and the Uralic languages use a wide array of them. The typological profile of Uralic possession seems unusual if compared with that of Standard Average European.

The characteristic features of Uralic possession are attested on both lexical and morphosyntactic levels.<sup>26</sup> On the lexical level, there are two main features of possession in Uralic.

(a) Many Uralic languages do not have a verb ‘have’, and the existential verb is used in predicative possessive constructions (Stassen 2009: 296). In those languages where the verb ‘have’ exists, it is likely to be an innovation (Laakso & Wagner-Nagy 2022: 977–978).

<sup>26</sup> Typologically, one of the crucial distinctions in the domain of possession is that between predicative (‘John has a car’) and attributive (‘John’s car’) possessive constructions (Heine 1997: 25–29; Herslund and Baron 2001: 4). However, since many of the features covered in this section are relevant for both of these construction types (possessive suffixes, genitive marking of possessor), we discuss them together, specifically indicating features pertaining to only one of them.

(b) In most Uralic languages there are no dedicated possessive pronouns ('my', 'your', 'his', 'her', etc.), and some form of the personal pronouns (usually the genitive) is used instead.<sup>27</sup>

On the morphosyntactic level, the following five features can be outlined.

(a) Most Uralic languages possess a genitive case, whose main function is to mark attributive relations between nominals. However, in the Finnic and Mordvin languages the genitive has another fundamental syntactic function, being one of the cases taken by objects (see section 2).<sup>28</sup>

(b) Most of the Uralic languages have nominal possessive suffixes. They are lost only in several Finnic languages, though they are also moribund in some Saami languages (Klumpp, Mazzitelli & Rozhanskiy 2018: 20–22).<sup>29</sup>

Besides possession, possessive suffixes can mark various things: definiteness, information-structural categories and others (see the list of these functions in Serdobolskaya, Usacheva & Arkhangelskiy 2019: 294). The presence or absence of the possessive suffixes in possessive constructions is language-specific and depends on various factors, including contact influences (F. Gulyás et al. 2018; Asztalos et al. 2021).

As there are several types of grammatical devices for marking possession in the Uralic languages, the question of their obligatoriness and the principles governing competition between them has become one of the core topics of Uralic studies. The obligatoriness of possessive suffixes varies across languages, and across constructions and possessee types within a given language. For instance, analysing predicative possession in a number of Uralic languages, Laakso & Wagner-Nagy (2022: 979) note that the presence of a possessive suffix on the possessee can make the pronominal possessor optional (35).

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27 In some languages (e.g. Finnic), the reflexive-possessive pronoun with the meaning 'one's own' is used in contexts typical for possessive pronouns, e.g. Estonian *oma naisega* own wife.COM 'with my/your/his/her wife'.

28 This syntactic function of the genitive does not come at the expense of its role in the domain of possession. The Finnic genitive has various functions which belong to the domain of possession or are related to it in some way (Huumo & Leino 2012).

29 Cf. on the possessive suffixes in Pite Saami: "they seem to have nearly fallen out of use in contemporary Pite Saami, and are only attested in three recordings from the corpus" (Wilbur 2014: 108).

- (35) Hungarian (Laakso & Wagner-Nagy 2022: 979)  
*(Nekiink) nincsen-ek gyereke-i-nk*  
 1PL.DAT NEG.EX-PL child-PL-POSS.LPL  
 ‘We don’t have children.’

In the domain of attributive possession, the case marking of the possessor and the possessive suffixes on the possessee create four combinatorial variants based on two binary features: (1) whether the possessor is case-marked or not, and (2) whether the possessee is marked with a possessive suffix or not. All four possible strategies (double-marking, dependent-marking, head-marking, and juxtaposition) are attested in Uralic (Pleshak 2018: 143). It is typical for a particular language to use several of these strategies (up to all four) and there then arises the question of the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic factors which influence their distribution (see Edygarova 2009 on Udmurt; Pleshak 2018 on Mordvin, Mari and Permic; Potanina & Filchenko 2015 and Vorob’jova & Novitskaja 2018 on Khanty; Wagner-Nagy 2014 on Nganasan; Wagner-Nagy 2020 on Selkup, etc.).<sup>30</sup>

(c) Besides the genitive, other cases can be used to express some types of possessive relations. For example, Edygarova (2009: 102–103) demonstrates that Udmurt attributive possessive constructions can contain various case forms: nominative, dative, inessive, elative, and instrumental. In Saami predicative possessive constructions, the possessor can be marked by the genitive or one of the local cases (inessive or locative), see Inaba & Blokland (2019: 107).<sup>31</sup> In the Finnic languages, the adessive case is used in Locational Possessive constructions (36), see also a Finnish example in Stassen (2009: 51).

- (36) Soikkola Ingrian  
*miu-l ono jauha*  
 1SG-ADE be.PRS.3SG flour  
 ‘I have flour.’

30 The use of possessive suffixes is not always conditioned by a complex interplay of factors. For instance, F. Gulyás (2020: 201) notes that “[i]n Komi-Permyak, the absence or presence of the possessive suffixes seems to depend on syntactic parameters, whereas semantic features do not affect coding properties”.

31 However, in North Saami no possession split is attested, and only the construction with locative case marking of the possessor is observed (Mazzitelli 2019: 181).

The locative meaning ‘on something’ (typical for the adessive) is often expressed by postpositional constructions, and thus the possessive meaning (‘to belong to somebody’ or ‘to be at someone’s place’) has become dominant for the adessive (at least in a number of Finnic varieties). The Finnic adessive case is a serial case which forms a series with the allative (‘onto’) and ablative (‘from upon’). The latter two cases appear in constructions with ditransitive verbs describing Transfer of Possession (37, 38), see Kalm et al. (2020: 93) on verbs of this type.

- (37) Soikkola Ingrian  
*hää ando-i miu-lle rahha-a*  
 3SG give-PST.3SG 1SG-ALL money-PART  
 ‘He gave me (some) money.’
- (38) Soikkola Ingrian  
*hää ott-i miu-lđ šaha-n*  
 3SG take-PST.3SG 1SG-ABL saw-GEN  
 ‘He took a saw from me.’

Thus, the Uralic languages have a vast inventory of possessor marking types, cf.: “The possessor in the existential-like possessive constructions is often, but by far not always, marked with a local or adverbial case: adessive in most Finnic languages, inessive (locative) in most Saami languages, while the Permic languages use the so-called genitive” (Laakso & Wagner-Nagy 2022: 978).

(d) Possession in Uralic is intertwined with other categories, and primarily with topicality. Nikolaeva (2014: 144–145) compares agreeing and non-agreeing lexical possessors (i.e. possessive constructions respectively with and without possessive suffixes on the possessee) and notes that the functional difference between them is “determined by a set of semantic and pragmatic factors” (Nikolaeva 2014: 144). The agreeing possessor often bears the role of secondary topic but in other constructions it is chosen “when the speaker wishes to emphasize the pragmatic salience of the possessor within the domain of the NP (as opposed to clause-level topics)” (Nikolaeva 2014: 148).

Ovsjannikova (2020) discusses two types of possessor encoding in Forest Enets: oblique and nominative. The latter is shown to be related to possessor topicalization, but synchronically it has likely become constructionalized and is currently the only option available in at least some

contexts, in particular in the predicative possessive construction. An analysis in terms of topicalization is also suggested by Gusev (2022) for the nominative possessor construction in Nganasan.

In Beserman Udmurt transitive clauses, the possessive accusative form (in contrast to an unmarked object or non-possessive accusative) is used when a previous topic regains topic status (Serdobol'skaja 2016: 40).

(e) Finally, an interesting and far-reaching issue concerns the relationship between possessive constructions proper and other areas of the grammar.<sup>32</sup> A relation between possessive and ditransitive constructions in Finnic was illustrated above by examples (36–38) from Soikkola Ingrian. Another widely attested parallelism exists between possessor marking in attributive possessive constructions and subject marking in non-finite clauses. Although possessors and subjects of non-finite clauses often share an inventory of encoding strategies, the parameters underlying their distribution are different (Serdobol'skaja et al. 2012: 414–423). In Finnic languages, there is similarity between the case marking of possessors and that of non-canonical subjects. For example, in Soikkola Ingrian, the cases which can mark the possessor – i.e. genitive and adessive (36), as well as the allative used in constructions describing Transfer of Possession (37) – also alternate as markers of the non-canonical subject in constructions with modal verbs (39–41).

- (39) Soikkola Ingrian (Markus & Rozhanskiy 2022: 325)

<i>miu-n</i>	<i>piittää</i>	<i>jootta-a</i>	<i>važikka-a</i>
1SG-GEN	have_to.PRS.3SG	give_drink-INF	calf-PART

‘I should give the calf some water.’

- (40) Soikkola Ingrian (Markus & Rozhanskiy 2022: 325)

<i>miu-l</i>	<i>piittää</i>	<i>män-nä</i>
1SG-ADE	have_to.PRS.3SG	go-INF

‘I should go.’

- (41) Soikkola Ingrian (Markus & Rozhanskiy 2022: 325)

<i>lapše-lle</i>	<i>tahtohuu</i>	<i>ledenitsa-a</i>
child-ALL	feel_like.PRS.3SG	sweets-PART

‘The child would like some sweets.’

32 Cf. “[p]ossessive marking may have other functions in a language, including the expression of subject and object, benefactives, locatives, and so on” (Aikhenvald 2013: 1).

## 8. Conclusions

In this paper we have given a brief overview of the studies collected in this volume and have highlighted their methodological diversity and the attention they pay to more intricate and understudied problems of Uralic syntax. We have also tried to complement this collection of papers with an overview of several topics in Uralic syntax, mostly pertaining to the core areas of the field. This overview clearly shows that recent years have seen a considerable growth in research on Uralic syntax, including both studies of minor and underdescribed languages and the generalization of pattern distribution across Uralic (in this respect, an important new source of data is the recent typological dataset of Norvik et al. 2022). We have also tried to indicate issues which have not yet been exhaustively studied. Needless to say, we have not been able to touch upon all the topics that deserve attention, for example, word order and contact-induced change in syntactic structure. Still, we hope that this paper and this volume in general may serve as a contribution to the synthesis and dissemination of knowledge on the syntax of Uralic languages.

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## Abbreviations

ABL – ablative, ACC – accusative, ACT – active, ADE – adessive, ALL – allative, AUX – auxiliary, CNG – connegative, COM – comitative, COMP – complementizer (“that”-conjunction), COND – conditional, DAT – dative, EP – epenthetic vowel, EX – existential predicate, FUT – future tense, GEN – genitive, IDEO – ideophone, ILL – illative, IMP – imperative, IMPF – imperfect, INE – inessive, INF – infinitive, IPS – impersonal, NEG – negation, NF – non-finite, NOM – nominative, OBC – objective conjugation, OBJ – object, OBL – oblique, PART – partitive, PASS – passive, PL – plural, POSS – possessive suffix, PROL – prolative, PRS – present tense,

PST – past tense, PST1 – 1st past tense, PTCL – particle, PTCP – participle, R – Russian loan, SG – singular, SPN – supine, TR – transitive, 1 – 1st person, 2 – 2nd person, 3 – 3rd person

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**Kokkuvõte. Maria Ovsjannikova, Fedor Rozhanskiy: Uraali keelte süntaks: põhiomadused ja väljakutsed. Sissejuhatus.** See sissejuhatav artikkel tutvustab Uurali süntaktiliste uuringute konteksti ja praeguseid väljakutseid. Esmalt tehakse lühikokkuvõte seitsmest SOUL-4 konverentsil ette kantud käesolevasse numbrisse valitud artiklist, millele järgneb ülevaade kuuest Uurali süntaksi valdkonna teemast, nimelt: diferentseeritud objekti markeerimine, objekti ühildumine, impersonaalsed konstruktsioonid, abisõnade süntaks, alistusseos ja mittefinitiivne predikatsioon ning omastavate konstruktsioonide süntaks. Käesoleva ülevaate eesmärk on näidata, kui keeruline ja mitmes mõttes võõras on Uurali süntaks Euroopa keskmise standardi perspektiivist ning kui palju küsimusi ootab veel edasist uurimist.

**Märksõnad:** Uurali keeled, süntaks, diferentseeritud objekti markeerimine, objekti ühildumine, impersonaalsed konstruktsioonid, abisõnade süntaks, alistusseos, omastavad konstruktsioonid.