Polar question markers in Finnic languages: Circum-Baltic and Uralic perspective

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Outline of the presentation

- Main types of polar interrogatives
- Development of polar question markers
- Disjunctive markers
- Pronominal markers
- Conjunctive markers
- Other types: epistemic and subordinative markers
- Conclusions
Data

- Previous research
- L1 and L2 speakers
- Dictionaries, databases,
- Language corpora (Centre of Estonian Language Resources [https://keeleressursid.ee/en/](https://keeleressursid.ee/en/))
- Google
Types of polar questions in Uralic languages (Miestamo 2011)

- Particles and clitics: Finnic, Sami, Mari, Permic, Ugric, Samoyed
- Intonation: all branches
- Word order: Estonian, Finnish, Komi
- Affix: Samoyed
- A-not-A (Skolt Sami, Komi)
Polar questions in the Circum-Baltic area (Koptjevskaja-Tamm & Wälchli 2001)

- Particles are principal means of expression
- Mostly sentence-initial particles
- Some source meanings: ‘or’, ‘also’, ‘with’
Grammaticalization of question markers 1

• The polar interrogative is a changing category; the devices change and vary in time (Metslang et al. 2011)
• In conversation sentences with different structures and functions could be interpreted as asking about the truth of the proposition
• Among the possible sources one or another begins to grammaticalize into an interrogative
• The same development logic can be triggered in any language
• The choice of the grammaticalization path may follow the example of a contact language
Grammaticalization of question markers 2

• In the course of grammaticalization the interrogative function is foregrounded in the meaning of the marker

• The language has at the same time both primary grammaticalized question markers (e.g. kas in Estonian) and secondary devices (e.g. Estonian ja ‘and’, aga ‘but’, et kas ‘whether’, vahest ‘perhaps’ in left periphery)
Grammaticalization of question markers 3

- The position of the analytical morphological device is fixed in the sentence (in the left or right periphery, to the predicate or some focused constituent)
- The phonological shape is shortened (e.g. Est kas, vä)
- An independent particle may become a clitic (e.g. Finnish -ko)
- The clitic may become an affix during the next stage
Grammaticalization of question markers 4

• Polysemy of the marker (e.g. conjunction and question marker) and the link with the source is lost

• The interrogative function is fixed together with the change in the word shape (e.g. Est kas is unambiguously an interrogative marker and is not associated with kaasa ‘together’); people do not perceive the origin of clitics
Research questions

• What are the main types of question markers in Finnic languages according to sources of grammaticalization?

• What do the Finnic languages have in common or what is different by comparison with the languages of the Circum-Baltic area and genetically related languages (Uralic)?

• What factors could lead to shared features and differences?
Question markers in Finnic languages

Estonian

*Kas*  *te*  *teate?*
Q  you.PL  know:2PL
’Do you know?’

Livonian

*Või*  *tēg*  *tīedat?*
Q  you.PL  know:2PL
’Do you know?’ (Viitso, Ernštreits 2012)

Finnish:

*Tulet-ko*  *kotiin?*
come:2SG-Q  home:ILL
‘Are you coming home?’
Where do polar interrogatives come from?

The form of a polar question
• typically emerges from a supposition
• develops according to the sequence

statement > supposition > conjectural question > neutral question
Sources of question markers

• **Means of linking sentences** in discourse
  - **coordination** (disjunctive ‘or’, conjunctive ‘and’, ‘also’, adversative ‘but’),
  - **subordination** (insubordination of complementizers ‘if’, ‘whether’, ‘that’, e.g. German *ob*),
  - **alternation** (‘or’, ‘or not’, ‘not’),

• **Markers of epistemic modality** (‘perhaps’, ‘maybe’),

• **Adding a tag question** (e.g. Estonian *eks ole?* ‘isn’t it?’, *mis?* ‘what’) to a declarative; these tags may themselves develop into interrogative particles.
1. Disjunctive coordination as a source of question markers

(1) offers an alternative to the preceding context,
(2) offers a possible continuation of the sentence content
(3) expresses choice between alternatives
(also the structure A–not-A, negation).

Very common in the languages of the world
(Bencini 2003)
Disjunctive markers in Finnic: ‘or’ > Q

Livonian või, aga, Estonian või~vä, Votic, South Estonian vai, Veps vä

Livonian
Või tēg tīedat?
Q you.PL know:2PL
’Do you know?’ (Viitso, Ernštreits 2012)

Livonian
Agā sa võtād mīnda?
Q you.SG take:2SG I:PRTV
’Will you marry me?’ (Viitso, Ernštreits 2012)
Disjunctive markers in Finnic: ‘or’ > Q

South Estonian

Oll´ viil´ myni muid syyrdo vai?
be:PST still some other:PL:PRTV sart.PL.PRTV Q
’Were there some other sarts?’ (EDC, Plv)

Estonian

Sa mingit võileivamaterjali
you.sg some:PRTV sandwich_material:PRTV
ka tõid vää?”
too bring:PST:2SG Q
‘You brought some sandwich material too?’ (CSE, FICT 1990)
Disjunctive markers in other Circum-Baltic languages: ‘or’ > Q

Sami *vaj*, Latvian *vai*, Latgalian *voi*, Polish and Russian *li*.

Latvian

\[
\text{Vai} \quad \text{jūs} \quad \text{runājat} \quad \text{angliski?}
\]

Q you.PL speak:2PL English

‘Do you speak English?’ (Raukko & Östman 1994)

Latgalian

\[
\text{Voi} \quad \text{zynit,} \quad \text{kas} \quad \text{ir} \quad \text{Kaspars Morbergs?}
\]

Q know:PRS:2PL who is Kaspars Morbergs

‘Do you know who Kaspars Morbergs is?’ (Nau 2011)

Polish

\[
\text{Wierzysz-li} \quad \text{mnie?}
\]

believe:2SG-Q I.ACC

‘Do you believe me?’ (Bielec 1998)
Disjunctive markers in other Uralic languages

Mansi (aman), Udmurt (-a (-o)) (?), Sami; Samoyedic; Sami, Komi A-not-A construction

Udmurt

*Petir magazin-*iₜ̥ njanj *baet-i-z-*̊a.

Peter shop-ELA bread.NOM buy-1PRT- 3SG-Q

‘Did Peter buy bread from the shop?’ (Edygarova 2016)
Spread of disjunctive markers 1

- Polysemy of the conjunction and the interrogative particle in Finnic languages indicates its rather recent development by comparison with e.g. the Slavic clitic *li*
- The disjunctive model of the contact languages serves as an example: Livonian adopted the disjunctive interrogative particle pattern found in the Baltic languages, using the native disjunctive conjunction *vai*
- *vai* was then borrowed into Latvian together with polysemy: both as a disjunctive conjunction and an interrogative particle. (Koptjevskaja-Tamm & Wälchli 2001)
- In Livonian the conjunction *aga* ‘but’ acquired a disjunctive meaning and adopted the polysemy of *vai*, it also functions as a question marker.
Spread of disjunctive markers 2

- The Slavic *li* is purely interrogative; the link with the conjunction *ili* ‘or’ has been lost
- Finnic disjunctive particles have probably developed later than the polysemy of the Slavic *ili* ‘or’; Finnic and Slavic could not have acted as examples for one another
- *li* was borrowed into Karelian and other contact languages of Russian as a ready-made interrogative unit
2. Pronominal markers

- Source is an interrogative pronoun or adverb
- Found in several languages, e.g. Latin, Bengali, Kannada, Turkish, Korean

Tag > question particle, e.g. the following source structure:

**Estonian**

*Mis, peegel süüdi, et lõust siuke?*

“What, it’s the mirror’s fault that your face looks like that?”

(FORUM)
Pronominal markers in Finnic 1

Clitic -kO (Finnish, Karelian, Votic, Ingrian), -(i)k (Veps), -g(i) (Ludic) (ko-group)

Finnish

Lukee-ko joulupukki e-kirjaa?
Read-Q Santa_Claus e-book.PRTV
‘Does Santa Claus read an e-book?’ (Google)

Veps:

Om-ik jüged tei-le pičukaiž-i-den
is-Q hard you-ALL small-PL-GEN
laps-i-denke ra-ta?
child-PL-COM work-INF
‘Is it hard for you to work with small children?’ (Grünthal 2016)
Pronominal markers in Finnic 2

- Clitics of the *ko*-group are probably of Finnic-Sami origin
- The source is a pronoun with a very general meaning; it has preserved e.g. in the Finnish word *koska, kon* ‘when’ in the relative pronoun *kon*, as well as in the Sami words *goal* ‘where’ and *goabba* ‘which’ (SSA)
- More precise grammaticalization path is not clear
Pronominal markers in other Circum-Baltic languages

North-West Russian dialectal *ti, či*, Ukrainian *cy*, Polish *czy* (‘what’ > Q) (či-group)

Polish

*Czy to est pan Krakowski?*

Q that is pan Krakowski
‘Is that Mr. Krakowski?’ (Hackstein 2004)
Pronominal markers in other Uralic languages 1

Sami -go, Skolt Sami -a, Mari mo, Selkup gaj ‘what’

Mari
Təj tolat mo?
you.SG come:2SG Q
‘Are you coming?’ (Alhoniemi 1985)

Selkup
Tëp kooptoqïn qaj ippïntï?
‘Is it true that (s)he is in bed?’ (Helimski 1998)
Pronominal markers in other Uralic languages 2

From a demonstrative pronoun into a question marker?
Hungarian -e < ’this’ (Zaicz 2006)

Jöttök-e?
come.2PL-Q
‘Are you coming?’
Spread of pronominal markers

- Sami-Finnic ko-group and Slavic či-group represent different development stages; the copying of polysemy is unlikely
- The pronominal markers of all these language groups are probably the result of different developments
3. Conjunctive coordination as a source of question markers

Use of coordinating conjunctions (‘and’) or connective particles (‘together’, ‘also’), steps of the function shift:

• to offer a conjectured continuation of the preceding text;
• conjectural question
• neutral question.

In Bulgarian and Macedonian interrogative particle a (Englund 1977).
Conjunctive markers in Finnic

Estonian and Livonian *kas*, South Estonian *ka* (<‘also, together’), Estonian *ega* (<‘also not’).

It is possible to observe their development in the Old Literary Estonian...
Development of Estonian *kas*

* *kansak* → *kaasa* → *kaas* (comitative adp.) → *-kaa* → *-ga* (comitative ending)
  ‘into the company’

*kaasa* (verb particle ‘together’)

*kaas* (connective ptcl ‘also’) → *ka* (connective ptcl ‘also’)
  ‘together’

*kas* (question particle)
Conjunctive markers in Finnic 1

Estonian

\textbf{Kas} \textit{me} \textit{ei} \textit{tohi} \textit{neid} \textit{oma}
\textit{Q} \textit{we} \textit{NEG} \textit{can.CNG} they.PRTV own

\textit{Vabadussõja} \textit{monumendiga}
\textit{War_of_Independence.GEN} monument:COM

\textit{ärritada}?
irritate:INF

‘Can’t we irritate them with our War of Independence monument?’ (NEWS)
Conjunctive markers in Finnic 2

Livonian
*Kas* sa lā’d?
Q you.SG go:2SG
‘Are you going?’ (Viitso, Ernštreits 2012)

Estonian
*Eiga* nemmad se külmaga kanna
NEG.Q they this frost:COM gather.CNG

wilja kokko?
grain.PRTV together

‘Don’t you think they might gather up grain during this frost?’ (COWE 1732)
Conjunctive markers in other Circum-Baltic languages

Old written Lithuanian be-group; modern Lithuanian er, ar; old written Latvian and contemporary Latvian dialects ar.

Lithuanian

Ar tū buvaī vākar miestē?
Q you.SG be:PST:2SG yesterday city:LOC

‘Were you in the city yesterday? (Dambriūnas et al. 1998)
Spread of conjunctive particles

• The Southern Finnic languages adopted the conjunctive question marker pattern from the Baltic languages and developed their own conjunctive particles (Koptjevskaja-Tamm & Wälchli 2001).

• Not found in other Uralic languages
Main types of question particles in the Circum-Baltic area
4. Epistemic markers (‘perhaps, maybe, so’)

- Rather, they could be secondary markers
- Estonian äkki, ehk; Finnish kai, Norwegian kanskje, Danish mon, Swedish månne, Lithuanian gal, Latvian varbūt

- In South Sami primary marker (mah, dagke)

(Mah/Dagke) datne bæjhpam åtnah?
Q you(.SG) pipe.ACC have.2SG
‘Have you got a pipe?’ (Ylikoski 2016)
5. Subordinating markers

- They could rather be secondary markers

Finnish

\[\text{Ai (et) sä puhut englantia?}\]

\( \text{INTJ CONJ you.SG speak:2SG English:PRTV} \)

‘Oh, you speak English?’ (Raukko & Östman 1994)

The Bulgarian and Macedonian interrogative particle *da* coincides with the subordinating conjunction ‘that’. (Englund 1977)
Conclusions 1

• Question markers change in time; new markers begin to develop as polysemous particles
• In the Finnic languages, similarly to the Circum-Baltic area, question markers (particles and clitics) are the main devices of expressing polar questions
• The Finnic languages do not reveal the older layer of markers - affixes
• More distant related languages reveal several methods of expressing questions (affixes and clitics), including more grammaticalized methods that indicate a long development path.
Conclusions 2

• The most widespread source of the question marker, according to the present data, is the disjunctive conjunction

• The main source of question markers in the languages of the Circum-Baltic area are conjunctions that denote disjunctive or conjunctive links and interrogative pronouns

• The Finnic-Sami clitic -ko with its variants represents the pronominal type, which can be found in scattered areas in some other Uralic languages
Conclusions 3

- In Finnic languages more recent coordination-based particles have developed in addition or instead of the pronominal clitic.
- Proximity of single types of Finnic question markers with the other Uralic languages shows distinctiveness of the grammaticalization paths of the question markers rather than common origin or contact influences.
- The conjunctive particle, which developed in the Baltic and southern Finnic languages, is characteristic type of the Baltic region that cannot be found in other genetically related languages.
Conclusions 4

Common features of particles in a language area, driven by language contacts, can be
1) the result of contact-influenced grammaticalization (conjunctive coordination pattern),
2) the borrowing of a linguistic form together with its polysemy (Latvian *vai*),
3) separate developments (Estonian *või/vä*),
4) the borrowing of a linguistic form in one particular function (Karelian *li*).
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