The Uralic causative marker and cognate suffixes

The paper offers a hypothesis on the origin of several Uralic suffixes. The discussion is based on published sources and the author’s field materials.

1. Almost all Uralic languages have a causative marker that contains t (or d), e.g. Estonian sōõma ‘to feed’ ← sōõma ‘to eat’; Finnish päästää ‘to let in/out’ ← pääse- ‘to get into/out’; Votic kazvotema ‘to grow sth.’ ← kazvoma ‘to grow’; Saami port ‘to feed’ ← porr ‘to eat’; Mari urgoktaš ‘to make sb, sew’ ← urgaš ‘to sew’; Udmurt wuritini ‘to ask/make sb, sew’ ← wurini ‘to sew’; Zyrian gižed ‘make him write’ ← giž ‘write’; Hungarian iratni ‘to tell sb, to write’ ← irni ‘to write’; Khanty таңнътата ‘to bring in’ ← таңта ‘to enter’, Nenets xaada ‘to kill’ ← xaa ‘to die’, etc.

2. Most of Finno-Ugric languages have a suffix that derives verbs from nominals and is either fully or partially identical with the causative suffix mentioned above (Kiefer & Laakso 2014: 478): Estonian tõõtama ‘to work’ ← tõõ ‘work’, Saami víkkt ‘to whiten’ ← vil’k’es ‘white’, Mari lümdäš ‘to name’ ← lüm ‘name’, Udmurt циндини ‘to emit smoke’ ← čin ‘smoke’, Mansi pástükve ‘to put a border mark’ ← pas ‘border’, etc.

3. A number of Finno-Ugric languages use a suffix containing t for adapting verbs borrowed from Russian: Votic strojttema ‘to build’ ← Russian stroj ‘build.IMP.2SG’, Zyrian doprašivajtini ‘to interrogate’ ← Russian doprašivaj ‘interrogate.IMP.2SG’, Mansi kuptenjve ‘to buy’ ← Russian kupi ‘buy.IMP.2SG’.

I suggest that the three listed suffixes have a common origin: they derive from a grammaticalized verb with the meaning ‘to do’. This hypothesis is supported both by the structural resemblance (the consonant t/d is present in all three suffixes), and functional similarity that can be traced not only in the Uralic languages but also in a broad typological context.

In particular, causative constructions with the verb ‘to do/make’ are typical for English, French, Korean, Tamil, etc. (Moreno 1993; Kulikov 2001: 886), and this verb is often grammaticalized (Lehmann 2015: 169). Generally, causative suffixes often develop from lexical verbs through formal reduction (Song 1996: 80-90). Causative suffixes derived from the verb ‘to do’ have been attested in many languages (Shibatani & Pardeshi 2002).

Suffixes that derive verbs from nouns clearly have the ‘to do’ component in their meaning: ‘to work’ means ‘to do work’ (for example, compare this verb in closely related Estonian and Votic languages: Estonian tõõtama ‘to work’ – Votic tiiü tetšemä ‘to work’ (lit. ‘to do work’)).

The verb ‘to do’ serves as an auxiliary that introduces borrowings in many languages, e.g. Udmurt atakovat karini ‘to attack’ from the Russian atakoat ‘to attack’ + Udmurt kariini ‘to do’.

I will also put forward a second hypothesis and speculate on the verb *teke- as a possible source of the grammaticalized suffixes. This verb is present in many Finno-Ugric languages (Finnish teke-, Estonian tege-, Saami dákka-, Erzya ije-, Hungarian iév-/fé-/fész-, etc., (Rđe 1988: 519)). Along with the causative suffix, this verb has been traced back earlier than in Proto-Uralic (Ruhlen 1994: 238, The Tower of Babel). The grammaticalization of the *teke- verb into a causative suffix had probably taken place in Proto-Uralic or even earlier.

References


