

Case alternation and polarity sensitivity with necessity modals in Poshkart Chuvash

Mikhail Knyazev

Institute for Linguistic Studies RAS / NRU HSE, St. Petersburg

1. Introduction The paper discusses two constructions expressing necessity in the Poshkart dialect of Chuvash (PC; < Turkic, spoken in the village of Poshkart/Maloe Karachkino in the Chuvash Republic, Russian Federation), focusing on the alternation between the nominative vs. genitive marking of the highest argument ('subject') as well as on the correlation between case and the flavor of modality. The paper reports an intriguing asymmetry whereby the genitive marking and the participant-internal necessity/'need' with one of the two constructions are available only under negation (and other non-veridical operators). A potential motivation for this constraint in terms of the general scopal properties of negation and necessity in PC is offered.

2. Necessity modals in PC Deontic as well as participant-internal ('need') necessity (see, e.g., van der Auwera & Plungian 1998) is typically expressed in PC by a mood-like form *-mALA* (a frozen combination of the non-inflected infinitival marker *-mA* and the attributivizer *-LA*) in construction with a genitive-marked subject, as in (1a)–(1b). Epistemic necessity is typically expressed by the adjectival predicate *kerlë* 'necessary', taking a nominative subject and an infinitival clause, as in (2a). The latter construction can also express deontic necessity, as in (2b)–(2c), although the form *-mALA* is more natural in this context (cf. (1b)). But speakers generally reject *kerlë* 'necessary' in contexts of participant-internal necessity, as in (2d).

- (1) a. *man* (^{??}*ep*) *amal* *ëe-me-le*.
I.GEN I[NOM] medicine drink-INF-ATTR
'I need to take a pill.'
- b. *san* (^{??}*es*) *pajan* *kae-pa* *urok-sam* *tu-ma-la*.
you.GEN you[NOM] today evening-INS lessons-PL do-INF-ATTR
'You must do homework tonight (you promised me).'
- (2) a. *ku* *arbuz* (**arbuz-ən*) *vonə kilo* *dort-ma* *kerlë*.
this watermelon[NOM] watermelon-GEN ten kilo weigh-INF necessary
'(According to my assessment) this watermelon must weigh (approximately) ten kilos.'
- b. *es* (**san*) *klas-ra* *pol-ma* *kerlë*
you[NOM] you.GEN class-LOC be-INF necessary
'You must be in the classroom (not sitting here with me, since you have a class now)'
- c. *kam* (**kam-ən*) *da* *bol-in* *škol-da* *jol-ma* *kerlë*.
who[NOM] who-GEN ADD БЫТЬ-CONC school-LOC remain-INF necessary
'Someone must stay in the school [building] (to guard it while the others are away)'
- d. ^{??}*ep* (**man*) *amal* *ëe-me* *kerlë*.
I[NOM] I.GEN medicine drink-INF necessary
Intended: 'I need to take a pill.'

The form *-mALA* can also express epistemic necessity, as in (3a), even though the construction with *kerlë* 'necessary' is more common in this context. Interestingly, in this case the subject must obligatorily be realized in the nominative case (see Matjuševa 2020). The NOM + *-mALA* construction can also express deontic necessity, as in (3b), especially in contexts where the subject is not the locus of obligation/prohibition (otherwise the genitive marking is strongly preferred (cf. (1b))).

- (3) a. *ku* *arbuz* (**arbuz-ən*) *vonə kilo* *dort-ma-la*
this watermelon[NOM] watermelon-GEN ten kilo weigh-INF-ATTR
'(According to my assessment) this watermelon must weigh (approximately) ten kilos.'

- b. *kam / kam-ən da bol-in škol-da jol-ma-la*
 who[NOM] who-GEN ADD БЫТЬ-CONC school-LOC remain-INF-ATTR
 ‘Someone [whoever it is] must stay in the school [building] (in order to guard it while the others are away)’

3. **The construction with the ‘polarized’ *kerlë*** Although the examples in (2a)–(2d) may suggest that *kerlë* ‘necessary’ is disallowed with the genitive subject, it is not impossible. However, the construction with genitive is highly restricted. Specifically, genitive can only occur in the presence of sentential negation and in other non-veridical contexts, as in (4b) (cf. (4a)), including polar questions, as in (4c), and conditionals. Thus, GEN + *kerlë* ‘necessary’ behaves like an NPI, which is not uncommon for necessity modals (see, e.g., Iatridou & Zeijlstra 2013 on the English *need*).

- (4) a. **san xola-ja kaj-ma kerlë*
 you.GEN town-OBJ go-INF necessary
 Intended: ‘You need to go to town (as you can’t buy a cow in the village)’
- b. *san (*es) xola-ja kaj-ma kerlë mar*
 you.GEN you[NOM] town-OBJ go-INF necessary NEG_ASCR
 i. √ ‘You need not go to town (as you can buy a cow in the village)’
 ii. # ‘You must not go to town (they can spot you there)’
- c. *san xola-ja kaj-ma kerlë-k-i?*
 you.GEN town-OBJ go-INF necessary-EMPH-Q
 ‘Do you need not go to town (to buy the cow or you can buy it here)?’

Note, though, that, some speakers, while fully accepting GEN + *kerlë_{pol}*, point out that it has a ‘literary’/Standard Chuvash flavor (it is indeed found in the corpus (<https://corpus.chv.su/>), instead opting for the construction with *-mAlA* under negation in the same context, as in (5i).

- (5) *san xola-ja kaj-ma-la mar*
 you.GEN town-OBJ go-INF-ATTR NEG_ASCR
 i. √ ‘You need not go to town (as you can buy a cow in the village)’
 ii. √ ‘You must not go to town (they can spot you there)’

Importantly, negation/non-veridicality in examples like (4b)–(4c) licenses not only the genitive marking but also participant-internal necessity, which is otherwise disallowed/strongly dispreferred with *kerlë* (cf. (2d)). This suggests an account in terms of lexical idiosyncrasy, whereby PC has a special polarized genitive-assigning modal *kerlë_{pol}* in the domain of participant-internal necessity as well as a non-polarized nominative-assigning *kerlë_{pol}* in the domain of epistemic/participant-external necessity. The lexical idiosyncrasy goes even further as *kerlë* can also express participant-internal necessity in construction with a nominal complement, as in (6). Note that in this construction the ‘subject’ appears in the objective (dative-accusative) case.

- (6) *man-a ěne kerlë.*
 I-OBJ cow necessary
 ‘I need a cow’

The fact that *kerlë* is never used in the participant-internal domain with infinitive (cf. (4a)) except under negation (non-veridical operators) is somewhat surprising in view of the fact that *kerlë* must be intrinsically compatible with this meaning (given examples like (6)). One potential explanation for this restriction might be related to the fact that in PC negation can take both wide and narrow scope with respect to the modal in the construction with *-mAlA*, as shown in (5). By contrast, in the construction with *kerlë*, as in (4b), negation unambiguously takes scope below the modal. Thus, we may hypothesize that there is some functional advantage in having a construction with an unambiguous scope assignment (cf. de Haan 2002) even if its modality flavor seems to go against the general tendency of *kerlë* with infinitive to be excluded from the participant-internal domain (where the alternative

construction with *-mALA* prevails). It remains to be seen whether this explanation fits in with the actual diachronic development of necessity modals in PC.

Selected references Matjuševa A.I. Konstrukcii so značením neobxodimosti v malokaračkinskom govore čuvaškogo jazyka // *Malye jazyki v bol'shoi lingvistike. Sbornik trudov konferencii 2020* / Red. Ks. P. Seměnova. — M.: «Buki Vedi», 2020. S. 140-145.