



# Expressing emphatic assertion of identity: evidence from Hill Mari

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## ● Topic

- Focus enclitic =*ok* in Hill Mari (< Finno-Ugric)
- Synchronic semantics
- Syntactic properties

(1) *tä kârâk gâc-än val-enä dä šändär*  
that hill EL-FULL go.down-NP ST.1PL and Sundyrka

***târ-äšk=ok.***

bank-ILL=EMPH


‘We go down that hill and (get) right to the bank of Sundyrka river’.



## ● Data


- Fieldwork (2016-2018)
- Gornomari district, Mari El, Russia
- The village of Kuznetsovo and its surroundings
- See more at <http://hillmari-exp.tilda.ws/en>

## ● Methodology

- Elicitation
  - A corpus of transcribed oral narratives
    - ca. 45000 tokens
    - 445 entries of *=ok*
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## ● Previous research

- Saarinen 1986 – some valuable observations on the semantics and context interaction of *=ok*
    - focus marking
    - in some cases indicates ‘similarity or the same degree’
    - productive uses on adverbs
    - can be combined with object and subject arguments
    - can mark converbs and imperatives
  - Sibatrova 1987, Ertsikova 2016 – no detailed picture of the semantics and syntax of *=ok*
  - Kozlov 2017 – current research on the western dialects of Hill Mari (the village of Mikryakovo and its surroundings)
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Semánticas



## ● Semantics

- Invariant: emphatic assertion of identity, cf. English *exactly, precisely*
  - [König 1991: 122]: “*Eben, gerade, ausgerechnet* and perhaps also *genau* are primarily used emphatically to assert the identity of one argument in a proposition with an argument in a different, contextually given proposition”
  - Regular interpretations following from this invariant
  - Semantically motivated restrictions on combinability
  - Special effects in some lexical and grammatical constructions
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## ● Regular interpretations

- ‘P, and earlier P, too’

(2) *tä*      *cânga-vlä-m*      *patkagâl’*      *šol-t-âmâ*  
that flatbread-PL-ACC cake boil-CAUS-PTCP.PASS/NMLZ  
*väd-eš=ok*      *šol-t-en*      *lâkt-ât.*  
water-LAT=EMPH boil-CAUS-CVB take.out-NPST.3PL

‘This kind of flatbread is cooked in the same water, in which cakes were cooked’.

## ● Regular interpretations

- ‘P, and P was previously mentioned’

(3) *vas'a slöpöj=ok, män' ške kol-ân-am*

Vasya blind=EMPH I REFL hear-PRET-1SG

*kâce vrač dono pop-en.*

how doctor with talk-PRET

‘Vasya is really blind, I have heard him talking to the doctor myself’.





## ● Semantics & combinability

- Highly productive in constructions comparing two entities in some way, e.g. comparative constructions or correlatives

(5) *maša kagâl'-âm papa-žâ gan'=ok tâšk-a.*  
Masha cake-ACC grandmother-POSS.3SG like=EMPH cook-NPST.3SG  
'Masha cooks cakes exactly like her grandmother'.

(6) *ma giš-än kü-n jäng-žä karšt-a,*  
what about-LAT2 who-GEN soul-POSS.3SG hurt-NPST.3SG

*tädä giš-än=ok pop-a.*

that about-LAT2=EMPH talk-NPST.3SG

'Everyone talks about whatever bothers them.

(lit. "Whoever feels pain wherever, he talks about it.").

## • Semantics & combinability

- Productive in specific NPs, usually avoided in non-specific NPs

(7) *tädä ti škol-âšt=ok rovotaj-âne-žä.*

that this school-IN=EMPH work-DES-3SG

‘He wants to work exactly at this school’.

(8) \**tädä ta-maxan'-gän'ät škol-âšt=ok rovotaj-âne-žä.*

that INDEF1-what-INDEF2 school-IN=EMPH work-DES-3SG

‘He wants to work at some school’.

## • Semantics & combinability

- Two readings in constructions with quantifiers:

(9) *cilä toma-št=ok svet jâl-a.*

all house-IN=EMPH light shine-NPST.3SG

1. ‘The light is really shining in all the houses’.
2. ‘**The light is shining in absolutely all the houses**’.

➤ Emphasis on exhaustiveness

## ● Emphasis on exhaustiveness

- Productive effect for quantifiers (& other items denoting quantity) pointing at some absolute meaning:

(10) *zavod*    *xoza-žâ*                      *šüdä*    *koklâ*    *voz*    *kärpäc-äm*  
factory    owner-POSS.3SG    100    20    cart    brick-ACC  
*cerkä-län*            ***takeš=ok***                      *pu-en.*  
church-DAT    for.free=EMPH    give-PRET

‘The owner of the factory gave 120 cartloads of brick to the church absolutely for free’.

- The quantifier introduces an extreme point at some cardinal scale.
- =*ok* emphasizes that the value in its scope coincides with this extreme point.

## ● Emphasis on exhaustiveness

- Not available for expressions of quantity without absolute meaning:

(11) *ti*     *i-n*             *olma-žâ*                     ***šuk=ok.***  
this    year-GEN    apple-POSS.3SG    much=EMPH

‘There are a lot of apples this year after all  
(and someone doubted that it would be the case)’.

## ● Special effects: habituality

- Habitual (frequentative) constructions: CVB + a light verb *šalgaš* ‘to stand’

(12) *vas'a ä'l-ä xala-štâ, šären tol-ân šalga-a*  
Vasya live-NPST.3SG city-IN often come-CVB stand-NPST.3SG  
*ävä-žä do-kâ.*  
mother-POSS.3SG at-ILL2

‘Vasya lives in the city, he often comes to see his mother’.

(13) \**vas'a ä'l-ä xala-štâ, ävä-žä do-kâ šoen*  
Vasya live-NPST.3SG city-IN mother-POSS.3SG at-ILL2 rarely  
*tol-ân šalga-a.*  
come-CVB stand-NPST.3SG

Int.: ‘Vasya lives in the city, he rarely comes to see his mother’.

## • Special effects: habituality

- =*ok* emphasizes the frequentative semantics

(14) *päšä*      *vaštalt=ok*      *šalg-en.*  
work      change.CVB=EMPH      stand-PRET

‘The working tasks were constantly changing’.

[A telephone engineer describes his work and different technological devices appearing as time went on]



## ● Special effects: habituality

- =ok may favour the frequentative reading (vs. the literal one)

(15) *papa*                    *kečä mâčkâ*   *rad'io-m*   *kolâšt*                    *šalg-a.*  
grandmother    day   along   radio-ACC   listen.to:CVB   stand-NPST.3SG

‘Grandmother all days long stands and listens to the radio  
(the literal reading, usually the first one, the frequentative reading  
is also available)’.

(16) *papa*                    *kečä mâčkâ*   *rad'io-m*   *kolâšt=ok*                    *šalg-a.*  
grandmother    day   along   radio-ACC   listen.to:CVB=EMPH   stand-NPST.3SG

‘Grandmother all days long listens to the radio  
(so that she cannot do anything else)’.

- =ok indicates here the top level on the frequency scale for events.

Syntax

## ● Syntactic constraints: NP

- The main rule: =ok almost always marks the head noun (whole constituent), but not the modifiers:

(17) *tädä jakšar sarapan-âṁ-ok / \*jakšar-(g)=ok saparan-âṁ näl-än.*  
that red dress-ACC=EMPH red-FULL=EMPH dress-ACC take-PRET  
'She bought exactly a red dress'.

- Several exceptions: =ok is fine with Gen (possessive) and with the pronoun *texen'* 'such':

(18) *vas'a-n=ok pi-žě / <sup>OK</sup>vas'a-n pi-ž=ok cilä sâkâr-âṁ*  
Vasya-GEN=EMPH dog-POSS.3SG Vasya-GEN dog-POSS.3SG=EMPH all bread-ACC  
*kačk-âṁ kolt-en.*  
eat-CVB send-PRET  
'It was exactly Vasya, whose dog has eaten all the bread'.

(19) *vot texen'=ok tum ulâ il'inka sola-štâ.*  
PTCL such=EMPH oak there\_is Ilyinka village-IN  
'There is exactly the same oak in the village of Ilyinka'.

# ● Syntactic constraints: Adv & Loc

- Statistically, =ok is highly compatible with adverbials and locative NPs
- No examples of cooccurrence with finite verbs found

↓Part of speech \ Use→	As Obliques / Adjuncts	Not as Obliques / Adjuncts
<b>Adverb</b>	≈ 22,3%	—
<b>Adverbial pronoun</b>	≈ 14,1%	—
<b>Noun</b>	≈ 17,5%	≈ 5,3%
<b>Quantifier</b>	≈ 1%	≈ 5,3%
<b>Postposition</b>	≈ 17%	—
<b>Verb</b>	≈ 2,9% (CVB)	≈ 4,9% (IMP)
<b>Reflexive pronoun</b>	—	≈ 7,8%
<b>Adjective</b>	—	≈ 1,5%
<b>Pronoun (other)</b>	≈ 0,5%	—
<b>TOTAL (100%)</b>	≈ 75,3%	≈ 24,8%

(Data from Hill Mari corpus)

## • Syntactic constraints: Adv & Loc

- =ok can mark an adverb or its modifier (intensifier), but not both of them:

(20) *tädä* <sup>OK</sup>*piš=ok* *päsän* / <sup>OK</sup>*piš* *päsän=ok* *asked-än.*  
that very=EMPH fast very fast=EMPH go-PRET  
'He was going very fast'.

(21) \**tädä* *piš=ok* *päsän=ok* *asked-än.*  
that very=EMPH fast=EMPH go-PRET  
Int.: 'He was going very fast'.

## ● Syntactic constraints: VP

- Most of our speakers consider =ok after finite VPs ungrammatical

(22) \**tädä tol-eš=ok.*

that come-NPST.3SG=EMPH

Int.: 'He will really come'.

- However, =ok is fine with converbs:

(23) *tädä lem-äm kačk-âñ=ok kolt-en / \*kačk-âñ kolt-en=ok.*

that soup-ACC eat-CVB=EMPH send-PRET eat-CVB send-PRET=EMPH

'He has really eaten the soup {he did not pour it out}'.

# ● Syntactic constraints: analysis


- =*ok* avoids [iT]-items (bearing the interpretable T feature)
- =*ok* receives a phrasal structure as an input, which does not let it attach to:
  - Pronouns: \**ti=ok* ‘that-EMPH’
  - Genitive expressing material: \**pu-n=ok toma* ‘wood-GEN=EMPH house’
  - Juxtaposed nominals: \**kärpäc=ok toma* ‘brick=EMPH house’
  - Small numerical NPs: #*väc olma när=ok* ‘five apple APPR=EMPH’



- **Syntactic constraints: analysis**

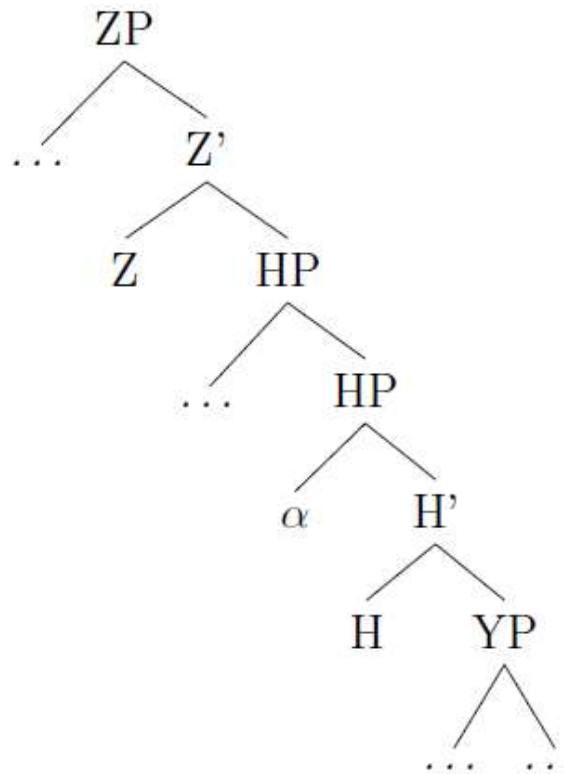
- **Phase Impenetrability Condition (PIC)**

$[_{ZP} Z \dots [HP \alpha [H YP]]]$

- The domain of H is not accessible to operations outside HP; only H and its edge are accessible to such operations. (Chomsky 2001: 13)
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# ● Background on phases



The phase as per (Chomsky 2001: 13).

# ● Syntactic constraints: analysis

- Arguments for phases in Hill Mari:

- Pied-piping: *vas'a-n=ok pi-žä* 'Vasya-GEN=EMPH dog-POSS.3SG' / *vas'a-n pi-ž=ok* 'Vasya-GEN dog-POSS.3SG=EMPH', which can be both interpreted as 'It is / was exactly Vasya, whose dog ...'
- Extraction out of phases is impossible, e.g. this means that a postposition and its complement cannot be separated (24)

(24) \**tän'* *kü* *lüd-ät* *gäc?*


you who be.afraid-NPST.2SG EL

Int.: 'Whom are you scared of?'

- **=ok marks phase boundary**



## ● Syntactic constraints: analysis

- **(Kiss 1998: 259) – Identificational focus**
  - "...an emphatic constituent in situ does not have the properties of an identificational focus. At the same time, it was also assumed that *only*-phrases function as identificational foci <...> Apparently, *only*-phrases can, but need not, move to spec-FP visibly. I suppose that the satisfaction of the focus criterion can be put off until LF (after spell-out) if the identificational focus feature of the given constituent is visible/audible in PF anyway."
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# ● Syntactic constraints: analysis

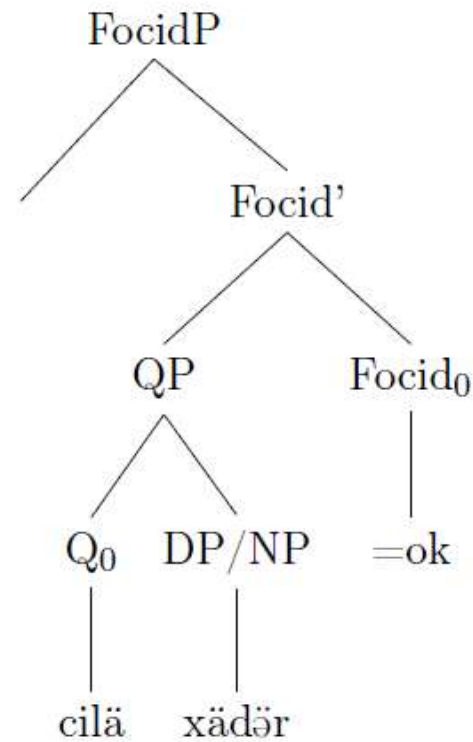


Figure 1: QP: “all the things”. =ok modifies the whole phrase.

# • Syntactic constraints: analysis

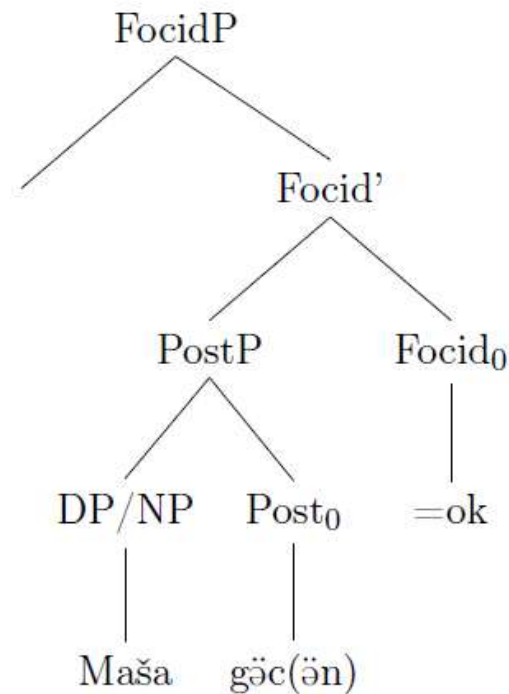



Figure 2: PostP: “from Maša”. =ok emphasizes the referential identity, however, it cannot be placed below the Post head.



## ● Syntactic constraints: analysis

- =*ok* tends to mark oblique cases rather than direct cases
  - There are two possible explanations of this phenomenon:
    - **(Formal approach)**: the structure of locative NPs considerably differs from the structure of other NPs and is similar to the structure of PostP, see Pleshak 2017; Davidyuk & Pleshak 2018.
    - **(Functional approach)**: =*ok* marks those nominal forms, which are syntactically less prominent, bringing into prominence their status in information structure, cf. [Kibrik 2003: 110] on the connection between the hierarchy of syntactic relations (SU > DO > IO > Obl) and their status in the discourse.
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Thank you for your attention!

