Voice without motivation. The extension of the passive/impersonal form of the verb to active contexts in Eastern Finnic and Northwestern Russian

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In many Finnic languages the synthetic forms encoding the Impersonal voice and the analytic forms encoding the Impersonal and Passive can be used as active personal forms of the verb. This extension of the passive/impersonal morphology to active forms is characterized by gradience. Different Finnic idioms manifest different degree of diffusion of these forms in the person and number paradigm of the verb. The further eastwards we move the greater the penetration of the passive/impersonal forms into the active paradigm. The extension is most advanced in Veps and Lude, the easternmost Finnic varieties (Kehayov 2017: 151–161; Kehayov, Lindström & Norvik, forthcoming); cf. (1) where the Impersonal form of the verb occurs instead of the active negative 3SG-form.

(1) Pomoemu, hän ei on-da täl ruodos.
in_my_opinion s/he NEG.3SG be-ACT.PRS.CONNEG(≈PRS.IMPS) here:ADE work:ADE
‘As far as I know he doesn’t work here.’ (Central Lude; Kehayov 2017: 160)

Similar active forms with passive origin have been observed in the Russian dialects spoken in the contact zone with Finnic, especially in those around Lake Onega. Here morphological forms of the Passive may occur in active personal contexts with overt Nominative actors; cf. (2).

(2) on tekhnikum koncheno
he.NOM technical_college.ACC finish:PASS.PST.PTCP
‘He finished a technical college.’ (Zaonezhye; Myznikova 2014: 114).

In this talk, I will discuss the structural magnitude of the phenomenon (relative to person, number, transitivity, tense and mood of the predicate verb) as well as the question of whether it is a result of unidirectional influence from language to language or we are dealing with some sort of joint innovation.

Sources