The Itelmen Inclusive Imperative: Composing Clusivity

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The Chukotko-Kamchatkan languages have a complex agreement pattern that includes both prefixes (marking subjects) and suffixes (marking transitive objects or intransitive subjects). Intransitive subjects are thus doubly marked, once by the prefix and again by the suffix. Older texts show a previously largely undescribed form: the plural inclusive imperative (Let's go) combines a 1pl imperative prefix (mən-), and a 2pl suffix (-sx). Such mixed forms are unattested in declaratives, even where the meaning is clearly inclusive. This appears to be part of a Sprachbund phenomenon, including the doubly-marked inclusive imperative in Russian (alone among Slavic languages): pojd-em-te go-1pl-2pl 'Let's go', and comparable doubly-marked forms in Northern Turkic (Dobrushina and Goussev 2005). In all these languages, the composed inclusive exists only in imperatives and not in declaratives.

I explore ways of capturing this distribution of -sx and its analogues, and why it can only mark a plural addressee distinct from the subject in imperatives, but not declaratives. The account suggests some choices among competing views of (i) syntax in the treetops—the question of what aspects of speech acts are encoded in the syntactic representation, (ii) clusivity—whether the inclusive-exclusive distinction represents a parametrization of underlying morphosyntactic categories (Zwicky 1997, McGinnis 2005) or is present in all languages, but neutralized in the morphology in languages like English (Ackema & Neeleman 2018), (iii) whether all agreement involves probe-goal relations or whether some exponents of person arise via contextual allomorphy (Bobaljik 2000, Fenger 2024).