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Motion verbs in Northern Siberian languages: the analysis of Nganasan, Dolgan and Evenki

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The aim of this presentation is to analyze the lexicological category of motion verbs in three non-related Northern Siberian languages, namely in the Uralic Nganasan, the Turkic Dolgan and the Tungusic Evenki from an areal-typological point of view. The research is primarily based on Talmy's framework (2000) that classifies the members of this category based on the semantic element they lexicalize, which can either be the Figure, the Manner or the Path of the Motion event.

From the three languages mentioned above, only Nganasan has been studied previously in this regard (Gusev 2007, Vojter 2024). As opposed to what Talmy (2000) and others (e.g. Filipović 2007) claim about Uralic (or at least, Finno-Ugric) languages, Nganasan can be analysed as verb-framed with no presence of any Path-satellites. Yet, it has a semantically split system with verbs expressing Figure (either human versus non-human entities), Manner (e.g. *hojkisʲa* 'run') and also Path (e.g. *ŋonsɨsa* 'go out'), sometimes even more of them in only one lexeme (e.g. *hūaŋkə* 'run away, escape'). While Path is expressed inherently within the limits of the verb, Manner can be added to it in the form of a non-finite satellite. The other function of Manner verbs is being present in mostly non-boundary crossing situation types (see Filipović 2007: 38). The additional meaning of the verbs depends on their aspectual characteristics, since the expression of Path and having a perfective lexical aspect are connected to each other in Nganasan (see more in Vojter 2024).

However, my talk also aims to give these results a wider perspective by researching motion verbs of those languages that are the closest to Nganasan geographically, that is, Dolgan and Evenki. I investigate the syntactic and semantic characteristics of motion verbs in these languages on the basis of Talmy's framework and I address my questions to the typological similarities and differences these systems can possibly have. The talk also covers other aspects, such as how their 'come' and 'go' verbs can be interpreted regarding their deictic meaning[1] or the possible grammaticalizations where the usage of a motion verb exceeds its typical function. The study is based on the Nganasan Spoken Language Corpus (Brykina et al. 2018), as well as the INEL Evenki (Däbritz – Gusev 2021) and Dolgan (Däbritz et al. 2022) Corpus.

The presentation offers a complex description of the motion verbs in Nganasan, Evenki and Dolgan, not only as languages of their own, but also as languages that have their own areal connections. The main focus being on Nganasan, this research results in deepening the knowledge about this specific language and about Samoyedic languages overall. However, building an areal typology involving endangered languages from other families will support the linguistic exploration of Northern Siberia and help portraying Nganasan from a broader perspective.

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