

Noun phrase structure of Kazym Khanty, a language of the Ob-Yenisei area

Kazym Khanty is a standardized variety of the North Khanty language, with its own orthographic system, a dictionary (Solovar, 2020) and a descriptive grammar (Kaksin, 2010). Geographically, the Khanty languages belong to the Ob-Yenisei area, which comprises four non-related language families in contact. There is still no overview of noun phrase structure in the area, even though language-specific descriptive works have been emerging lately: Enets (Shluinsky 2020), Selkup (Däbritz & Budzisch 2022), and Evenki (Däbritz 2023). Other descriptions are scattered across relevant grammars and fieldwork reports. Based on the available materials, the goal of my study is to analyze Kazym Khanty NP structure using functionally oriented linguistic theory, thus enhancing cross-linguistic comparisons between the Uralic languages and their neighbours.

Noun phrases can be studied from different angles and theoretical frameworks (Rijkhoff, 2004; Dryer, 2007). For Kazym Khanty, I am building an ontology of morphosyntactic types using the methodology proposed by Rießler (2016). This cross-linguistic classification of adjective attribution in the languages of Eurasia is based on source, pattern, and locus, thus it can be extended to morphosyntactic description of noun phrases in general. In addition to well-known NP characteristics in Uralic languages, such as juxtaposition and head-final constituent order, this approach also implies studying violations of those, as well as noun phrases without nouns. The latter are definitely present in North Khanty but are not discussed in the above-mentioned papers on Ob-Yenisei languages, nor described in the grammar of Eastern Khanty (Filchenko, 2010).

The main typological characteristics of Kazym Khanty NP are typical of Uralic family. Constituent order is head-final and fixed, with the only exception of postpositional phrases, which are head-initial. Juxtaposition is the main syntactic type, whereas in possessive NPs dependents agree with heads in person and number. Dependents are always in the (unmarked) nominative. Possible dependents are nouns, adjectives, pronouns, numerals, non-finite verb forms, relative clauses and postpositional phrases. My talk will provide an overview of all morphosyntactic features of those types, observing both possessive and non-possessive NPs.

In addition to the size and possible dependents, three distinctive aspects of Kazym Khanty noun phrases will be covered. Firstly, evidence demonstrates elliptical noun phrase with

demonstratives, possessives and numerals as dependents (Fedorov 2022). According to Nikolaeva (1999) attributive adjectives can also be used independently in North Khanty. In independent use, adjectives and demonstratives take on the formatives of the respective noun. Secondly, deviations from the standard head-final structure are observed in other Ob-Yenisei languages, but the specific patterns are different. In North Khanty, head-initial structure is triggered by postpositional phrases, while in Selkup the same effect is caused by some quantifiers, and in Enets by some demonstratives in a specific information structure pattern.

Thirdly, North Khanty, and Kazym in particular, uses embedded noun phrases for comparison. The formative suffix *-at-* that is used in these structures is seen by some researchers as a nominalizing word-formation suffix, while others see it as a morphological suffix with a parametric meaning. This issue is worth further inquiry.

To summarize, Kazym Khanty NP structure is quite typical for the Uralic languages. However, there are a few interesting points that have not been discussed in full: use and marking of modifiers without nouns, deviations from the head-final structure and morphosyntax of embedded noun phrases. My approach is cross-linguistic and helps to understand Kazym Khanty NP structures in areal dimension.

References

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