The *Definiteness Effect* in existential and locative sentences in Central and Southern Selkup
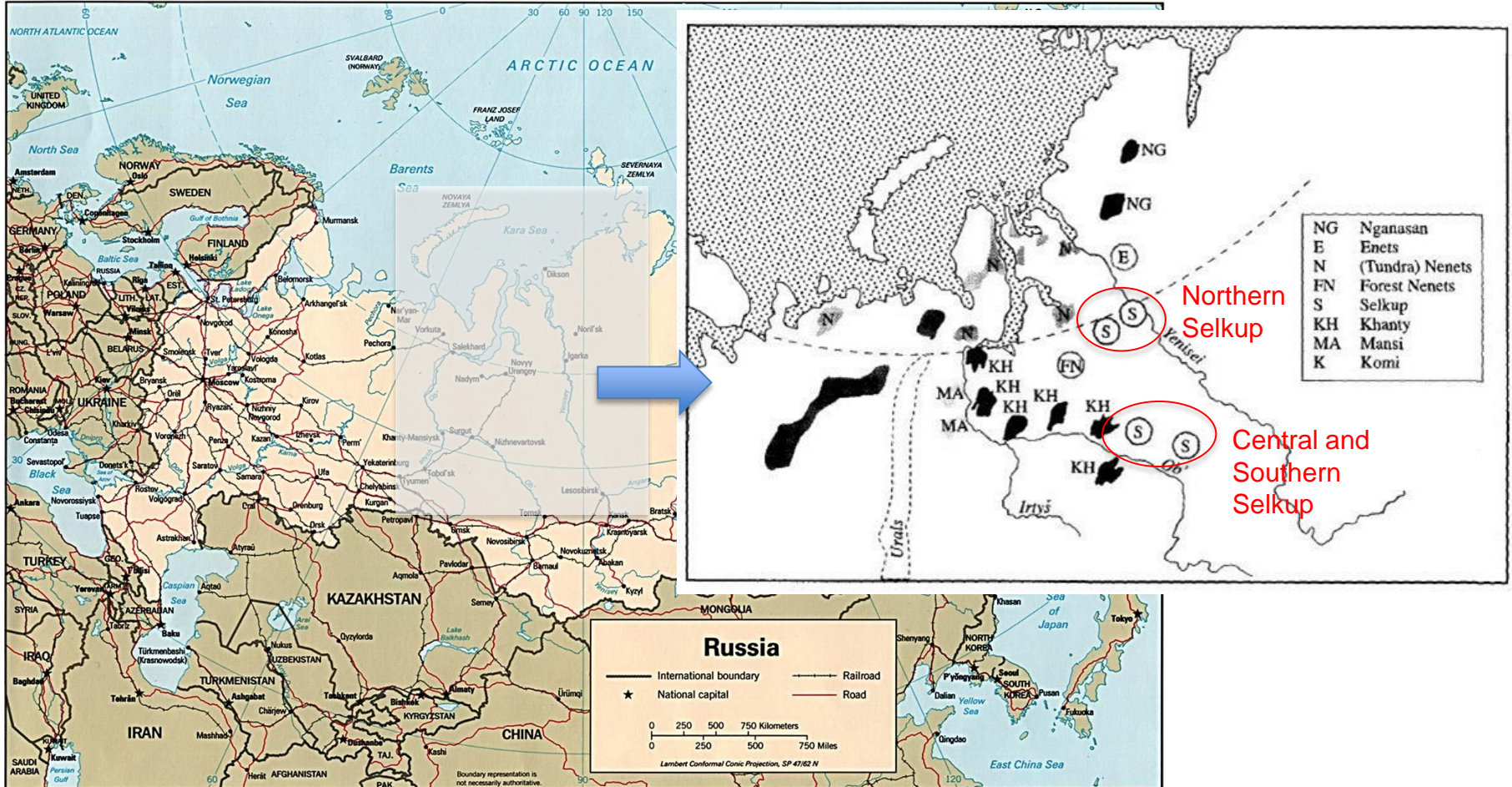
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28. Dulzon Readings 2017, 27.07.2017

Structure

– Selkups and their language

– Corpus

– Existential and locative sentences

   – Definiteness effect

Selkup language

– Selkup belongs to the Samoyedic branch of the Uralic language family

– According to the Russian Census (2010): 3,649 Selkups and 1,023 speakers

– Three main dialectal groups: Northern, Central and Southern

  – Each of these groups has various subdialects

  – Most speakers speak a variant of Northern Selkup, Central and Southern Selkup are almost extinct

  – Central and Southern Selkup are presumably closer to each other

Corpus

– DFG project: *Syntactic description of Central and Southern Selkup dialects: a corpusbased analysis* (WA 3153/3-1)

– Covering 100 years of data

  – Total of 119 texts

  – All texts are previously published (only written material!)

  – Mostly folklore and narratives, some translations

Subcorpus for the present study

– 65 texts – 2,290 sentences, 14,024 tokens

- 25 speakers (21 female, 3 male, 1 unknown)

- Date of recording: 1961–2014

- Covering three genres: 50 folklore texts, 14 narratives and 1 translation

– 34 Central and 31 Southern Selkup texts

Existential and locative sentences in Central and Southern Selkup

– The difference between existential and locative sentences is marked by word order:

  – Existential: (Loc) – Th – Cop

  – Locative: Th – Loc – Cop

– Selkup in general does not have a special existential verb – the verb *eːqo* 'to be' is used in both types of sentences

Existential sentence:

(1) Central Selkup, Narym

Nača-t	*hombla*	*maːn*	*e-ɣa.*
there-LOC.ADV	five	house	be-AOR.3SG

'There are five houses.' (SAI_1984_StoryAboutLifeLong_nar.030)

Locative sentence:

(2) Central Selkup, Narym

Kɨba-qup	*tweː-l*	*čebo-ɣɨt*	*e-ppa.*
small-human.being	birchbark-ADJZ	cradle-LOC	be-HAB.3SG

'The child was in the cradle.' (SAA_1984_MyGrandmother_nar.007)

Existential sentences in Central and Southern Selkup

Expected word order: (Loc) – Th – Cop

(3) Central Selkup, Vasyugan

Nat'e-ɣɨt	*tudo-t*	*ukkɨr*	*haj-he*	*e-ja-dɨt*.
there-LOC.ADV	crucian-PL	one	eye-INS	be-AOR-3PL

'There are one eyed crucians.' (ChDN_1983_Nikita_flk.005)

(4) Southern Selkup, Middle Ob

Swɛšk	*kotiŋ*	*ɛː-ja*.
cone	many	be-AOR.3SG

'There are many cones.' (SMS_1980_ItjaForest_flk.030)

Existential sentences in Central and Southern Selkup

The word order is always kept regarding (Loc) – Th, but the placing of

copula is variable:

(5) Central Selkup, Narym

Nu	*tap-č'el*	*e-ja*	*qwäʒ'ə-dəl*	*nädek.*
Well	this-day	be-AOR.3SG	be.beautiful-PTCP.PRS	girl

'Well, today there was a very beautiful girl.' (SAA_1971_ThreeSisters_flk.068)

(6) Central Selkup, Narym

Nača-ɣət	*kɨ-ge.*
there-LOC.ADV	river-DIM

'There is a river.' (MNN_1977_Hunt_nar.007)

Locative sentences in Central and Southern Selkup

Expected word order: Th – Loc – Cop

(7) Central Selkup, Narym

Mat	taw	e-a-k.
I	here	be-AOR-1SG

'I am here.' (MNN_1977_ItjaGrandmother_flk.021)

Again: Copula is more flexible:

(8) Southern Selkup, Middle Ket

Teb-i-n	pidə-t	t'uː-n	puːčo-ɣən.
he-EP-GEN	nest-3SG	earth-GEN	inside-LOC

'His nest is in the ground' (KMS_1966_MouseGray_flk.005)

Exeption: Loc – Th

(10) Central Selkup, Tym

N'aro-kɨn   *e-ja*   <u>*na*</u>   *tu.*
swamp-LOC   be-AOR.3SG   this   lake

'This lake is at the swamp.' (KFN_1967_HumanSizedPike_flk.011)

In all examples found with the exceptional word order, a definiteness

marker is overt: demonstrative pronouns, possessive marking...

Definiteness effect

– The theme of an existential sentence cannot be definite

  – While in locative sentences it mostly is

– Milsark (1977), Leonetti (2008) and many others

(11a)   *There is a cat.* vs. **There is the cat.*

(11b)   *Es gibt eine Katze.* vs. **Es gibt die Katze.*

Strong and weak DPs

– Some modifying elements can be regarded as indefinite (weak DPs), whereas others mark the DP as definite (strong DPs)

strong DPs	weak DPs
the	a
Demonstratives	something, someone
Pronouns	Number determiners
Possessive DET's	Plural and mass
Universals (all, every, each..)	Determiner in nonuniversal reading
DET in universal reading	Milsark (1977: 46): strong and weak DPs for English

Strong and weak DPs in Central and Southern Selkup

strong DPs	weak DPs
Proper names	Number determiners
Demonstratives	Quantifiers as 'such', 'many', 'few'
Possessive markers	
Universals	

(following Wagner-Nagy 2016: 233 for Nganasan)

– Strong DPs can only be found in locative sentences
– Weak DPs favor existentital sentences

Strong DPs in Central and Southern Selkup

Possessive marking (repeated):

(12) Southern Selkup, Middle Ket

teb-ɨ-n	*pidə-t*	*t'uː-n*	*puːčo-ɣən.*
he-EP-GEN	nest-3SG	earth-GEN	inside-LOC

'His nest is in the ground' (KMS_1966_MouseGray_flk.005)

Demonstrative pronoun (repeated):

(13) Central Selkup, Tym

N'aro-kɨn	*e-ja*	*na*	*tu.*
swamp-LOC	be-AOR.3SG.S	this	lake

'This lake is at the swamp.' (KFN_1967_HumanSizedPike_flk.011)

Strong DPs in Central and Southern Selkup

Proper Name:

(14) Southern Selkup, Middle Ob

I:de-n   mogo-ɣɨn   Ka:na.
Itja-GEN back-LOC   Kana

'Kana is behind Itja' (lit: 'Kana (is) in the back of Itja.') (TFF_1967_ItjaHuntsElk_flk.015)

Weak DPs in Central and Southern Selkup

Number determiner (repeated):

(15) Central Selkup, Narym

Nača-t	*hombla*	*maːn*	*e-ɣa.*
there-LOC.ADV	five	house	be-AOR.3SG

'There are five houses.' (SAI_1984_StoryAboutLifeLong_nar.030)

Quantifier (repeated):

(16) Southern Selkup, Middle Ob

Swɛšk	*kotiŋ*	*ɛː-ja.*
cone	many	be-AOR.3SG

'There are many cones.' (SMS_1980_ItjaForest_flk.030)

Definiteness effect in Central and Southern Selkup

- In Central and Southern Selkup strong DPs only occur in locative sentences

- Existential and locative sentences differ only in regards to word order

  - Available data suggests that unquantified DPs in existential sentences cannot receive a definite interpretation

  - Word order is used to mark definiteness

  - If there is a special marker for definiteness (a strong DP), the word order is variable in locative sentences

Summary

- Selkup does not have a verb solely expressing existence

  - *eːqo* 'to be' is used in existential and locative sentences

- The word order in existential sentences is (Loc) – Th

  - The position of the copula is variable, zero copula is possible

  - For negation a special NEG.EX-verb is used

- The word order in locative sentences is Th – Loc

  - The position of the copula is variable, zero copula is possible

- (In)Definiteness in existential and locative sentences is mainly marked by word order

  - Strong DPs can only occur in locative sentences

  - If a strong determiner is used, the word order in locative sentences is more variable

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Thank you
for your attention!