

Defense of PhD Dissertation
*The semantics of Udmurt spatial
cases*

by Riku Erkkilä

Questions posed by Laura A. Janda,
UiT The Arctic University of Norway

Outline

- Topic of dissertation and overall impressions
- Questions
 - from Preliminary Examiner's Statement
 - other specific questions about dissertation
 - question to conclude discussion
- Assessment of merits and critical points
- Proposal concerning acceptance of dissertation

Topic of dissertation

- **semantic analysis** of the spatial cases of Udmurt (inessive, elative, egressive, illative, terminative, prolativ, and approximative)
- **theoretical perspective** of Cognitive Linguistics and observed parallels between spatial cognition and language
- analysis is informed by “**principled polysemy**” (adapted to facts of Udmurt) and **typology of grammaticalization**

Overall features of the dissertation

- analysis draws on theoretical framework of Cognitive Linguistics, additionally also psychology and neurology
- adaptation of theoretical models previously focused mainly on English to facts of Udmurt
- documentation of facts of Udmurt
- quantitative data on the distribution of senses within Udmurt spatial cases
- illustrated with 380 authentic examples, all supplied with Leipzig glossing and translations

Overview of questions

- Questions posed in Preliminary Examiner's Statement
- Other questions about the dissertation
- Concluding questions about this line of research

Questions posed in Preliminary Examiner's Statement

Where is possible rivalry in the system, both among spatial cases and with other cases?

This example (p. 226) uses relative, but could inessive be used?

(180) Udmurt dunne (10.04.2007)

| | | | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| <i>Višon-li</i> | <i>u-g</i> | <i>šot-sk-o</i> | <i>pešaj-jos:</i> | <i>gurt</i> |
| sickness-DAT | NEG.PRS-3 | give-DTR-CNG.PL | old.woman-PL | village |
| <i>kotir-iš</i> | <i>už-zes</i> | <i>no</i> | <i>uža-lo,</i> | <i>vaňmon</i> |
| surroundings-ELA | work-ACC.PX.3PL | CNJ | work-PRS.3PL | free |
| <i>dır-zes</i> | <i>no</i> | <i>vožjaški-mon</i> | <i>ortčít-o.</i> | |
| time-ACC.PX.3PL | CNJ | envy-PTCP7 | spend-PRS.3PL | |

‘The old women are not giving up to sickness: They both do the work around the household [lit. village], and spend free time until envying [i.e., enviably].’

This example (p. 249) uses egressive, but could inessive be used?

(205) Udmurt dunne (23.10.2007)

Munčo-išen so-je vu pušk-i kušt-o, noš borjš siče
sauna-EGR 3SG-ACC water inside-ILL throw-PRS.3PL CNJ later that.kind
vu-en gilt-išk-o.

water-INS wash-DTR-PRS.3PL

‘In the sauna they throw it [a coin] in the water, and later they wash themselves with that [kind of] water.’

What is the overall frequency (both ipm and relative) of the Udmurt spatial cases?

- For example, is egressive more frequent than relative?
- What is the relative frequency of source vs. goal cases?
 - Note that some have claimed that goal-orientation prevails in language

Why are some similar meanings/uses classified differently?

- For the relative case there are five examples of uses that signal people from someplace (149, 152, 171, 175, 178), yet all of these have been annotated differently -- why?
 - (149) p. 204 “Origin” **Ot-iś** eš-jos-*inj*-m [**there-ELA** friend-PL-INS-PX.1SG] ‘my friends from there’
 - (152) p. 206 “Source” **nił.pi jur**t-iś [**child house-ELA**] ‘boy from orphanage’
 - (171) p. 219 “Location” *Ač*-iz, *pe*, **Baškiri-iś**, [self-3SG PCL **PLN-ELA**] ‘She is apparently from Bashkortostan’
 - (175) p. 223 “Place” **per**tem **sereg-jos-iśt-iz** eš-jos [**different corner-PL-ELA-PX.3SG** friend-PL] ‘friends from different corners’
 - (178) p. 225 ambiguous between “Place” and “Origin” **ot-iś** *jibirtjaś-jos-ti* [**that-ELA** bower-PL-ACC] ‘worshippers [from] there’

Why are idiomatic uses termed “periphery constructions”?

- Does this term come from Schmid 2014?
- Do idiomatic uses play any important role in the system, or should they be set aside?
 - p. 141 на солнце *šundj vj l-ijn* [sun top-INE]
 - pp. 279-80 под суд *sud ul-e* [trial under-ILL]
 - p. 210 *ulonjś koškj nj* ‘die [lit. leave from life]’
 - pp. 227-228 *Nunal-ijś nunal-e* [day-ELA day-ILL] from day to day

Other questions about the
dissertation

p. 64, p. 68

Table 2: There is a desinence of $-\emptyset$ cited for the illative.
What is your understanding of zero morphemes?

“only content nouns with inanimate referents can be inflected in spatial cases”

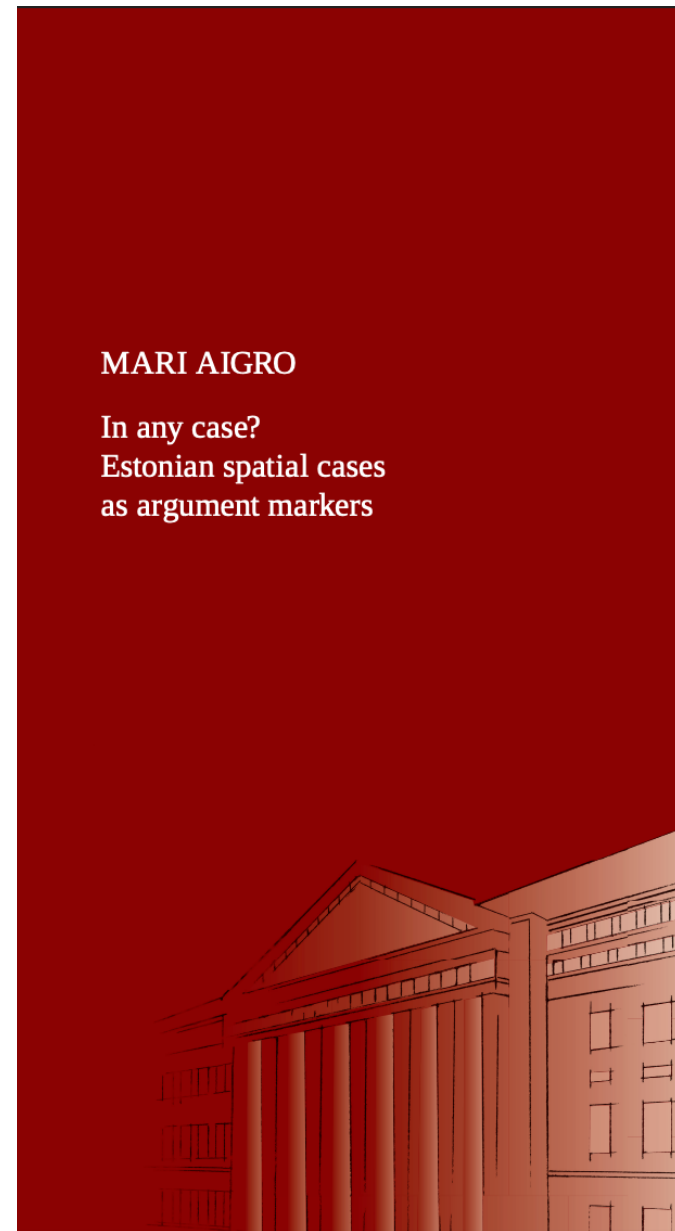
So how are spatial relations with animates expressed? By adpositions?

Aigro 2022 PhD dissertation on Estonian spatial cases

14 cases in Estonian

- 3 are “structural” (aka “syntactic”, “grammatical”) cases mark core argument roles: nominative, partitive, genitive
- 11 are “semantic”, of these
 - 6 are spatial cases: illative ‘into’, inessive ‘in’, elative ‘out of’, allative ‘onto’, adessive ‘on’, ablative ‘from on’

Spatial cases can sometimes be used to mark core argument roles (see next slide), and the structural cases sometimes appear in adverbials.



Aigro 2022 PhD dissertation on Estonian spatial cases

- (1) a. Enno kõndi-s bussijaama-st koju
Enno.NOM walk-PST.3SG bus station-ELA home.ILL
'Enno walked home from the bus station'
- b. Üritus sõltu-b ilma-st
event.NOM depend-PRS.3SG weather-ELA
'The event depends on the weather'

“semantic”

“structural”

Comparing Estonian and Udmurt spatial cases

Is there any “leakage” in Udmurt, are there uses of spatial cases to mark argument roles?

If not, why would Udmurt be different from Estonian?

Aigro suggests that the use of spatial cases with human referents leads to the bleaching of spatial cases and grammaticalization to mark argument roles. What do you think of this?

Talmyan classification, caused-motion, resultatives

Is Udmurt verb-framed or satellite-framed? How does this play out with respect to spatial cases?

Are there caused-motion or resultative uses? Is ex (37) on p. 106 an example of resultative?

(37) Udmurt dunne (11.11.2009)

Kalik gur+r! šerekja, noš Saša peš-e vu-i-z.

people INJ laugh.PRS.3SG CNJ PN **heat-ILL** arrive-PST1-3SG

‘People laugh “Hahaha!”, but Saša becomes ashamed [lit. arrives to heat].’

Relational nouns: *viļ-* ‘top’, *dor-* ‘near’-, *pum-* ‘end’, *bord-* ‘next, near’, *ul-* ‘under’

- I get the sense that SURFACE vs. CONTAINER is disambiguated by relational noun *viļ-* ‘top’ – is that correct?
- What is the LM (landmark)? Is it the noun modified by the relational noun or just the relational noun? cf. these exx. on p. 41:

(14) Udmurt dunne (03.08.2017) / Ext.

Žad'em muš no šaška viļ-e ležišk-i-z (...)
tired bee CNJ flower top-ILL land-PST1-3SG
'Also the tired bee landed on [top of] the flower (...)'

(15) Udmurt dunne (16.05.2012) / Ext.

L'uba ž'igar-tek ležišk-i-z pukon viļ-e.
PN strength-CAR land-PST1-3SG chair top-ILL
'Ljuba sat down [lit. landed] on [top of] the chair strengthless.'

Role of other factors in case semantics

- Why should the meanings of verbs (e.g. translocational motion vs. other) and forms of verbs (e.g. finite vs. converb) be taken into account when distinguishing the meanings of the cases?

Is the meaning of starting and source given by the verb, not the case in these exx. (pp. 154, 156)?

(83) Udmurt dunne (25.01.2012)

Kal'l'en+kal'l'en *už* *dur-a-m* *projekt-jos* *śot-ja-ni*
slowly+slowly work edge-LOC-PX.1SG project-PL give-FRQ-INF
kutsk-i-zi, *oži* *vetli-ni* *kutsk-i* ***komand'irovka-os-ti*** (...)
start-PST1-PX.3PL CNJ travel-INF start-PST1.1SG **work.trip-PL-PRL**

‘Little by little they started to give projects at [lit. the edge of] my work, so I started to travel on [lit. along] work trips.’

(86) Udmurt dunne (27.07.2016)

– *Gurt-len* *kıldem-ez* *śariś* *tače* *l'egenda* *vaň:* *čigan*
village-GEN birth-PX.3SG about this.kind legend EXT.PRS Roma
nıl.kišno ***ta-ti*** *nunı-jen-iz* *košk-e* *vılem.*
woman **here-PRL** child-INS-PX.3SG leave-PRS.3SG EXT.PST2

‘– There is such a legend about the birth of the village: A Roma woman had apparently left along here with her child.’

Does encyclopedic knowledge play a role in case semantics (p. 381)?

(374) Kondrat'eva (2011: 198) / Ext.

Miŋ-išk-o mon Iževsk uram-ti

go-PRS-1SG 1SG PLN **street-PRL**

'I go along Iževsk street'

(375) Kondrat'eva (2011: 199) / Ext.

*Gurt-e **gumi-jeti** vu pirt-i-zi (...)*

village-ILL **pipe-PRL** water bring-PST1-1PL

'They bring the water to the village via a pipe (...)'

Terms for the meanings of the cases overlap

- For example, for prolativ we have: Path, Location (path), and Place (path)
- Are the differences really crisp or are they more gradual?
 - cf. p. 174 “Example (116) elaborates the schema of PLACE completely, but these kind of examples can be considered bridging contexts between PATH and PLACE.” [this suggests gradual transitions among the meanings]
 - Section 7.1.2 seems to regard overlaps in the semantic structure of spatial cases as a problem, but shouldn't overlaps be expected in language? Isn't it often the case that languages allow for multiple ways to encode the “same”realia?
- We already saw examples of meanings of relative that are classed differently but seem very similar; more exx. on next 4 pages...

Prolative (going to a number of places)

- pp. 148-149 (74) *avto.salon-jos-ti* [car.dealership-PL-PRL] Path(Middle)
- p. 154 (83) *komand'irovka-os-ti* [work.trip-PL-PRL] Path(source)
- p. 162 (95) *koncert-jos-ti* [concert-PL-PRL] Location(Path)

Egressive (from a street)

- p. 249 (206) *Kirov ul'č'a-i š'en* [PLN street-EGR] Place
- p. 258 (217) *Babuškin ul'č'a-i š'en* [PLN street-EGR] Mental process

Illative (to work)

- p. 278 (241) *už-e* [work-ILL] Goal
- p. 283 (250) *už-e* [work-ILL] Goal (Endpoint)

Approximative (here and there)

- p. 367 (360) *so-lań+ta-lań* [there-APR+here-APR] Direction and Place
- p. 371 (365) *so-lań+ta-lań* [there-APR+here-APR] Location
- p. 374 (369) *so-lań+ta-lań* [there-APR+here-APR] Place

Fictive motion: is this relevant for more exx.?

Several exx. are identified in introductory chapters as fictive motion, for example (17), p. 44:

(17) Udmurt dunne 17.04.2009 / Ext.

– *Ma, kapka až-išen adž-išk-e uk: kjk gurež, o-ti*
PCL gate front-EGR see-DTR-PRS.3SG PCL two mountain there-PRL
śures mjn-e.
road go-PRS.3SG

‘– Well, it can be seen from the gate [lit. from the gate onwards]: Two mountains, there goes a road.’

But otherwise fictive motion does not figure in the dissertation much. Maybe more could be done with this concept?

Other possible exx. of fictive motion?

- p. 171 (111) *šur-ti viž-ez* [river-PRL bridge-ACC] ‘bridge **over river**’
- p. 250 (206) *Kirov ul'ča-i šen* [PLN street-EGR] ‘Pushkin street is closed **from Kirov street**’
- p. 253 (211) *5-i šen* [five-EGR] ‘(the number increased) **from 5 to 7**’
- p. 254 (212) *21 nunal-i šen* [21 day-EGR] ‘lasts **from 21 to 90-100 days**’
- p. 262 (222) *Trassa-i šen* [highway-EGR] ‘the road **from the highway to Izgurt**’
- p. 233 (223) *Čimošur-i šen* [PLN-EGR] ‘the mountain stretches **from Čimošur to Spring Hill**’
- p. 300 (277) *škola-je* [school-ILL] ‘roads leading **to the school**’

pp. 60, 61

“If children learn to connect linguistic elements to categories, the categories must be non-linguistic.”

“...there is a structured conception of space and spatial configurations in human cognition, and this structure is systematically mapped onto language. These presuppositions also underlie this study. The basic human conception of space and spatial configurations is not dependent on language, but rather is prelinguistic”

Are these necessary assumptions? Couldn't it be possible for linguistic and non-linguistic categories to co-evolve? Even if human perception is universal, could conception be different? And is it possible to distinctly untangle perception and conception?

Concluding questions about this
line of research

Imagine you are a teacher...

If you were teaching someone the Udmurt spatial cases, how would you do it?

Imagine a perfect world with unlimited resources and no wars...

If you had unlimited resources to continue this line of research, what would you do? What kind of research would you do if you could go to Russia/Udmurtia?

What has changed?

How have your ideas changed over the course of your research?

What would you have done differently?

Circling back to the main point...

What does this research tell us about language in general (not just Udmurt)?

Assessment of merits and critical points

Assessment of merits

- appropriate choice of theoretical framework, well-structured analysis
- solid and deep control of theoretical framework, consistently applied and made very accessible to a wide range of linguists
- first ever to provide quantitative data on the distribution of senses within Udmurt spatial cases, and first to approach this topic following traditions of Cognitive Linguistics
- adaptation of theoretical models previously focused mainly on English to facts of Udmurt
- documentation of facts of Udmurt
- quantitative data on the distribution of senses within Udmurt spatial cases
- illustrated with 380 authentic examples, all supplied with Leipzig glossing and translations

Critical points

- There could be more focus on places where the case semantics overlap, where the cases compete with each other, and on the relationship between the case meanings and the meanings of the words they mark and their collocates.
- We have learned about the relative frequency of senses within the Udmurt spatial cases, but what about their overall relative frequency and what does this tell us about source vs. goal expressions in Udmurt?
- Data has been archived on Zenodo, but it is not certain that this conforms to the FAIR principles of research (findability, accessibility, interoperability, and reusability). Riku Erkkilä might consider a professionally curated repository such as TROLLing (<https://site.uit.no/trolling/>).

Proposal concerning acceptance of dissertation

I hereby propose that the PhD dissertation *The semantics of Udmurt spatial cases*, presented and defended by Riku Erkkilä today, April 25, 2026, be **accepted** by the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Helsinki and Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München.

CONGRATULATIONS

to Riku Erkkilä, his mentors, family, and friends!