Historically Problematic Morphosyntactic Features in Uralic Languages

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The introductory chapter 1 of this book addresses the question of a novel approach to the history of Uralic – Finno-Ugric and Samoyed – languages. The investigations clearly show that among the reconstructed Proto-Uralic structural features by far not all belong to common Uralic. At the same time the large number of them find equivalents in the neighbouring non-Uralic languages.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to the problematics of some Uralic morphosyntactic features. The genitive with the suffix -m has actually been one of the earliest Uralic object cases. Uralic languages are accusativeless because in those languages there is no individual case form for a direct object. The primary determinant of the choice between the indefinite/definite conjunctions in Uralic languages was animativity/transitivity. Discrimination of indefinite/concrete conjunctions and concomitant reference to the number of the objects as well as to a person of the object in the verbal forms are phenomenon that is inherent to the whole of Northern Saami and besides Uralic languages occur in a number of Paleo-Siberian languages.

In case of Uralic verbal personal k-markers we can probably come across very little etymologically common suffix-material inherent to all Uralic languages and at times they may prove to be of Turkic origin altogether. It may be supposed that a non-personal general-definitive function has always been inherent to the Uralic 3rd person possessive suffix. An unexpected feature in several Uralic languages is the lack of the Finnish type of the possessive genitive attribute of the possessive suffix (minun laulun ‘my song’, cf. the Estonian type without a possessive suffix in minu laul ‘my song’). It need not necessarily always indicate the retreat of the use of possessive suffixes as is usually supposed.

In chapter 3 it is shown that neither does it exclude the possibility of supposing an eastern source for the formation of the Livonian via an onetime broken Finno-Ugric linguistic chain. Chapter 4 demonstrates that it would be more discreet to admit that the origin of the Ugric t-locative, l-ablative and Hungarian k-plural is not known, however, it is hardly probable that they should have a general Finno-Ugrian background.

Vogul

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The Vogul language (endogenous name: Manši) is spoken by approximately 3,000 speakers in northwestern Siberia. Together with Ostyak, it forms the Ob-Ugrian branch of the Uralic language family and is generally considered to be closest relative of Hungarian. In the introductory section general information on the Vogul people and their sociolinguistic situation is given. The dialect described in the following sections on Vogul phonology, morphology, and syntax is the Northern one, spoken by the greatest majority of modern Voguls and forming the basis for the literary language. Vogul is in the most respects a typical agglutinative language and its grammar is relatively straightforward, i.e. unencumbered with major rules of inflection. In this study particular care is taken to place (Northern) Vogul in a general Finno-Ugric and a complete Vogul cognate shift is based on the newest research results in population genetics. An emphasis lies on the synchronic description of (Northern) Vogul, the discussion is supplemented by observations of a historical nature to show to what extent (Northern) Vogul has adhered to general Finno-Ugrian patterns and to which extent it has diverged both from the related languages and other Vogul dialects. This study closely looks at two structural Vogul texts with an interlinear transcription and translation.

Main Language Shifts in the Uralic Languages

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The aim of this book is to address the issue of some main language shifts in the group of Uralic languages. The motive for supposing the language shifts is based on the newest research results in population genetics. Thus Lapp (Saami) languages have long been supposed to have developed in the manner that the Lapps' ancestors shifted from their early language to a Finnic-Ugric language form. The author believes that earlier the Lapps spoke some kind of an unfamiliar language or a Finno-Ugric language form that they changed into the Lapp language form. The data of population genetics make one suppose that the development of Samoyed and Ugric languages took the same course and that the Samoyeds’ and Ugrians’ ancestors shifted from their ancient, probably a Paleo-Siberian language form to a Finno-Ugric language form. At this the linguistic data seem to indicate that the Samoyeds obtained a Finnic-Lapp language form. A peculiarity of Mordvin languages “in word stock they are close to Finnic languages, in grammar to Ugric and Samoyed languages” makes one also suppose a language shift.

The introductory chapter I of this book addresses the question of the historical development of groups which show convergence and divergence, gives a short overview of the nature of the innovative treatment of Uralistics as well as the author's aspirations to distinguish between the early Uralic languages and mythical perceptions emerged in Uralistics.

Chapter II is dedicated to mainly three language shifts in one age group: Samoyed, Lapp and Ugric along with Mordvin.

Chapter III is meant to set a background for the language shifts under observation by means of several more recent investigated concrete lexical and morphosyntactical treatments. As related to it, the author observes the substratum toponymic
matter of North Russia which is unquestionably partly of the Finnic type and which testifies to the existence of onetime spoken languages of that type considerably farther in the east than the present-day Finnic linguistic area reaches (supposedly the Samoyeds’ shift to a Finnic language form took place somewhere in the east). The linguistic area of the use of the accusative and prepositional direct objects as well as the initial component n of personal suffixes in the Uralic language group also speaks for the shift from Samoyed former language(s) to a Finnic language form.

In chapter IV an example of evidentiality in the Uralic language group is given, illustrated by the Samoyed Enets: there is nothing specifically Uralic in it.

The book ends with a Conclusions, an appendix with Figures and a References.

Contact-induced Perspectives in Uralic Linguistics
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The author of the book would make an attempt to outline a few features of a recent significant paradigm change in the Uralic (Finno-Ugric and Samoyed) linguistics. The main factor of linguistic processes is supposed to be language contacts, not so much a spontaneous change of languages, although the latter should also be borne in mind. The concept of linguistic affinity has also been subjected to criticism. The common features of Uralic languages developed thanks to various contacts among different languages whereby a language of the lingua franca type could operate as an intermediary.

Thus any Uralic language could always differ from other languages of this group, partly retaining its origin from source language(s), unknown to us at date. Later on it could also, after entering another Uralic languages thanks to language contacts or, on the other hand, it could become more different as a result of various contacts with others than Uralic languages. The role of a language prestige in the process of language changes through history is being emphasized at present.

The similarities between Finnic-Lapp and Samoyed languages have earlier been regarded as a result of a better survival of the Proto-Uralic heritage at the extreme peripheries of the expansive zone of occurrence of Uralic languages. But the Finnic-Lapp-Samoyed similarities may hypothetically be regarded as onetime areal-typological (contact) similarities. Northern Indo-European languages - Germanic, Baltic and Slavic - are supposed to have developed so that the speakers of Uralic language form learned to speak that of the Indo-European.

Kamass
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Kamass is one of the Samoyed languages, extinct to date, but of considerable interest from the point of view of historical linguistics. The Samoyed and Finno-Ugric languages together form the Uralic family of languages. The Kamass native speakers lived in Siberia, on the northern slopes of the Sayan mountains. Earlier they were reindeer rears of shamanistic faith. Up to date they have changed to using Russian or some local Turkic language and become agriculturists.

The first written records about the Kamass language date back to the year 1721. The author of this book is the last gleaner of the Kamass linguistic facts whose last informant died in 1989. Kamass is supposed to have had the Koibal dialect, the latter, however, has left us nothing more in writing than about 600 words. Like the Kamass, the main Kamass dialect itself was divided into two subdialects.

The number of the native speakers of Kamass was very small years ago already, perhaps a couple of hundreds. Kamass languages had an alphabet of its own, to say nothing about having its own written language or school instruction.

In Kamass a strong phonetical and lexical influence by the neighboring languages can be observed. Due to the scarcity of Kamass written records, it is possible to report only an approximate phonological characterization and a few basic features of syntax. On the other hand, a comparatively good picture can be obtained about its morphology and lexicology, there are also a few longer texts available.

Typologically, Kamass is an agglutinative language with numerous flective markers. Syntactical features predominate over analytical ones. On the whole, Kamass is rather a typical Uralic language. The parts of speech in Kamass are nouns, adjectives, numerals, pronouns, verbs, adverbs, postpositions, conjunctions, particles and interjections. Grammatical gender is lacking. There are three numbers: singular, dual and plural. The category of case is predominantly expressed by suffixes, there are seven cases. For the complete abstract, please see www.lincom.eu.

Ostyak
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This study is intended to provide a grammatical description of Ostyak, one of the Uralic languages spoken in Western Siberia. The description is based on the Northern Ostyak dialect of Obdorsk, although divergent features of other dialects are also discussed. The present paper emphasizes the syntactic aspect of the language, typically ignored in previous descriptive work on Ostyak, which mostly concentrates on its phonology and morphology.

Part 1 is a concise sketch of the Ostyak grammar, made up of the following sections: "Introductory remarks" (geographic and sociolinguistic data, previous studies, dialect division), "Phonology" (including phonetics and prosody), "Morphology" (grammatical categories, word formation, illustrative paradigms), and "Basic syntax" (types of simple and complex sentences, discourse phenomena). A sample text in the Obdorsk dialect of Ostyak is provided.

Part 2 elaborates on certain syntactic topics that are of a particular interest from the typological viewpoint. In particular, the following topics are discussed: information structure and word order, object agreement, passivization, the relative clause, clause-chaining and reference tracking, and the category of the evidential.

Part 3 serves to provide the necessary references. It contains the bibliography relevant to the present study, as well as the basic bibliography on Ostyak. The latter includes editions of the folklore texts, lexicographic publications, comprehensive descriptive and the most important studies on certain aspects of the Ostyak grammar.