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Cases denoting path in Komi: Semantic and typological perspectives

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Introduction

In the Komi language, there are two very similar cases that express path: prolativ and transitive in -əd and -ti. According to Haspelmath (2009), such via-cases are a rare phenomenon in languages, and therefore it is especially interesting that Komi has two of them.

Hypothesis

In principle, any linguistic category can grammaticize to the extent that it is expressed by an inflectional case (Janda 2007: 639–640). When this happens, the case is in a paradigmatic opposition to other cases of the language (Janda 2007: 643–645). It can be inferred that:

- If there is no grammatical meaning (incl. semantic meanings), that is, it is not in paradigmatic opposition to other cases of the language, the case should not be productive.
- As the two via-cases of Komi, the prolativ and the transitive, are a productive part of the case system (Bartens 2000: 107), their meanings should differ in some way.
- The hypothesis is that the via-cases of Komi differ in their morphosyntactic or semantic meaning.
- Differences have been proposed, but to our knowledge, they have not been tested against a corpus

Morphosyntactic meaning means that different cases encode the same meaning in different morphosyntactic positions, e.g., nouns and postpositions (e.g. in Mari, see Alhoniemi 1985). Semantic meaning means that both cases may occur in the same morphosyntactic positions but are used to express events that differ in some way from one another.

Corpus

- Within Fenno-Ugrica collection
- Proofread in FU-Lab (komikyv.org)
- Texts published in 1923–1934
- 400,000 tokens: 232 prolatives, 202 transitives

Typical transitive (noun)
'flying through the air'
jəz-ɪd lebate-jas moz sinəd-ti lebal-əni saridz-jas saj-ə
people-2SG bird-PL like air-TRA fly-3SG.PRES sea-PL behind-ILL
People, like birds, fly through the air across the seas.

Adpositional transitive
'smooth out through a meadow'
bur-dʒik vidz-jas viv-ti poz-ə agas-ən ʃiɫəd-əni
good-COMP meadow-PL above-TRA can-3SG.PRES harrow-INST smooth_out-INF
One can smooth out (over) better meadows with a harrow.

Typical and adpositional prolativ
'go by ship by rivers and along the sea coasts'
vodzdʒiknas parəvəj sudno-jas-ən vetl-isni səmin ju-jas-əd da
earlier steam vessel-PL-INST go-3PL.PST only river-PL-PRL and
more bereg dor-jas-əd
sea coast edge-PL-PRL
Earlier steam ships used to travel only along rivers and sea coasts.

Typical prolativ with hole
'gas expels through holes'
koɫk kiʃ roz-jas-əd pet-ə gaz, kodi kovtəm sen rədite:əm kurəpijan-li
egg shell hole-PL-PRL exit-3SG.PRES gas which unnecessary there developing chick-DAT
The gas that is not needed for the developing chick is expelled through the holes in the egg shell.

Classification

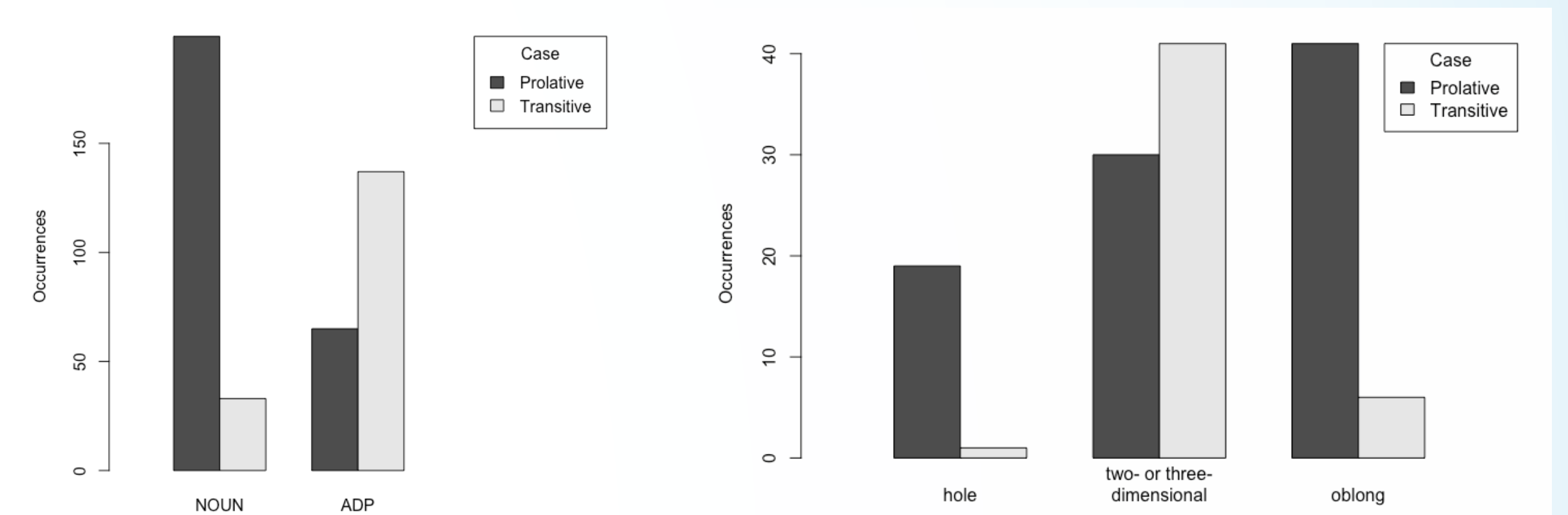
The landmarks were divided into three categories according to their properties. The verbs were divided into two categories based on the quality of the action they represent.

Landscape features		
Lemma	Translation	Landscape feature
сөн	vein	hole
труба	pipe	hole
вом	mouth	hole
улица	road	oblong
ю	river	oblong
ловгорш	windpipe	oblong
дждж	floor	two- or three dimensional
море	sea	two- or three dimensional
сынёд	air	two- or three dimensional

Verb semantics		
Lemma	Translation	Category
мунны	to go	directed motion
ветлыны	to visit	directed motion
лэбавны	to fly	directed motion
плавайтны	to swim	directed motion
нуодны	to lead	directed action
босьтны	to take	directed action
кэдзны	to sow	directed action
разавны	to spread	directed action

Results

We found out that prolativ and transitive are used in different morphosyntactical contexts. Prolativ is used more with nouns and transitive with postpositions. This division is not sharp, but it is a strong tendency.



We also found three types of landmarks whose properties seem to influence case selection: 1) landmarks that indicate a passage, 2) oblong landmarks with one functional dimension, and 3) two- or three-dimensional landmarks. Types 1 and 2 occur almost exclusively with nouns in prolativ, while type 3 occurs more with nouns in transitive than in prolativ.

Our study also shows that the marking of path in Komi is not dependent on the semantics of the predicate. There is no difference in case distribution when verbs are classified into direct action and motion groups.



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