

Spatial relationships and case functions in the Uralic languages of Siberia and the Tungusic languages

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The general goal of this paper is to make a contrastive description of spatial relationships and semantic functions of spatial cases with a special focus on dative as a main means of their expression in some languages of Siberia, belonging to different language families : Uralic (Khanty and Nenets) and Tungusic (Negidal and Evenki).

The cognitive concept of motion consists of two dislocated loci – a source of motion and its goal, which are connected by a path. In reality, languages treat this « ideal » concept in many different ways and grammaticalize it by different cases or by lexical meanings of the verb, etc.

1. Spatial relationships in the Uralic languages of Siberia

KHANTY

In Northern Khanty dialects, spatial relationships are expressed mainly by postpositions. There are more than 40 serial and isolated spatial postpositions, which specify different types of position of an object in space. The case system in these dialects is elementary and consists of only 3 cases : nominative (=Ø), dative (=a), locative (=n).

In the Obdorsk dialect, only one case – locative – has a spatial meaning. It designates both location and direction :

as=na (river Ob=LOC) *noɤətɫ*

« (S/he) is fishing at the river Ob » (location) ;

was=na (village=LOC) *juχət tãłsəw*

« (We) brought trees to the village. »

In the Kazym dialect, in active constructions dative may express destination of motion (where to ?) :

lor=a (lake=DAT) *mãnəs*

« (S/he) went to the lake », or simple location (where?) :

háñ λaraś=n (chest=LOC) *ǒł*

« Bread is in a chest ».

1.1. Dative with intransitive verbs

In Kazym Khanty, the prototypical meaning of the dative case involves physical motion. It refers to horizontal or vertical motion towards the final point :

Mũη kqrt=ew=a (village=POSS=DAT) *jǒχtəl*

« (S/he) will come to our village » ;

łũw wũśłax=a (dirt=DAT) *šɔjłəs*

« S/he sank into dirt ».

The dative case also exhibits natural extensions of its basic meaning, from physical motion to « motion » within internal, mental and emotional, domains of a human being.

In mental sphere it describes the shift of attention to a new point, which is grammatically treated as a goal of action :

Ma tǒrm=a (sky=DAT) *aŋkərtsəm*

« I looked at the sky » ;

mãn=em (1/Sg=DAT) *χɔłməs*

« (S/He) listened to me ».

Grammatically, such verbs as *to look*, *to hear* behave as verbs of motion in that they take a dative argument. It is not quite a visual or acoustic perception in a proper sense of this word, but it is an attempt to attract attention to what may be seen or heard next. Such verbs are

often followed by verbs of perception, which take the accusative (*I looked at the sky and saw clouds*).

The other figurative meaning of the dative case is motion in the emotional domain :

λqχəs=λal=a (friend=POSS=DAT) *amtəs*

« (S/He) is glad to (see) his friends ».

The dative case reveals directionality of feelings towards a source of emotion. In fact, there are only a few predicates describing emotions in Khanty, because in that culture the public expression of emotions is not encouraged.

1.2. Dative with transitive verbs

With transitive verbs, dative refers to the goal of the transfer. This relation is specified further as recipient, addressee or beneficiary depending on the domain (physical, mental, social), lexical meaning of the verb and the animacy or unanimacy of participants.

In situations of physical displacement, a material object is transferred to some destination :

ikem háñ tãłta λapkaj=a (shop=DAT) *tel*

« My husband brings bread from here to the shop ».

Transmission is the next step in the derivation of the motion meaning. It considers a person to be a destination of a process. Transfer is carried out in the social domain as an interaction between people :

Ma λqχs=em=a (friend=POSS=DAT) *mɔjłapsem mǎsem*

« I gave my coat to my friend ».

If the object is an idea, e.g., some kind of information (*a story, a tale, a song*) – then the situation is represented as a mental transfer of information :

aŋkaŋkem mǎn=em (1/Sg=DAT) *mǔś mǔśəs*

« My grandmother told me a fairytale ».

The most abstract extension of the notion of motion is represented in sentences with verbs describing different types of activity, fulfilled on behalf of a beneficiary (creation of an object, different types of manipulation with an object, etc.). Since their lexical meaning doesn't include a component of motion, this confirms that a construction itself can have its own meaning: the dative case implies the meaning of destination, which transfers to the meaning of transmission of a result of an action to a person:

ma šatšas=em=a (grandmother=POSS=DAT) *lant ločlem*
« I'll buy flour for my grandmother ».

All types of transitive constructions and their meanings are summarized in the Table 1.

Table 1
Semantics of transitive constructions with a dative argument

Proposition	N _{Nom} ^{Ag}	N _{Nom} ^{Pat}	N _{Dat} ^{GOAL}		V _f
Physical transfer	Animate	Material	Place	Destination	Verbs of displacement
Social transfer « Giving »	Animate	Material	Animate	Recipient	Verbs of giving
Mental transfer of information	Animate	Ideal	Animate	Addressee	Verbs of speech
Benefactive action	Animate	Material / Ideal	Animate	Beneficiary	Verbs of action

2. Conclusions on the Kazym Khanty dative case

In Kazym Khanty, case system is elementary, because cases mark communicative roles of topic and focus. Nominative is the case that marks topics; dative is a case of a goal in the focus scope. As far as there are only two main communicative roles, there can't be many cases in a language like this.

The most general meaning of the dative case is the endpoint of a trajectory. It presupposes that the boundary of a locum, toward which the motion is directed, is not crossed.

Table 2
The concept of motion and its extensions in different domains in Kazym Khanty

Meaning	Domain		
Motion (intransitive sentences)	Physical	Mental	Emotional
Transfer (transitive sentences)			Social

NENETS

In Tundra Nenets, the system of locative cases includes special cases for every component of the concept of motion: locative (=χVnaʔ/=γVnaʔ/=kVnaʔ) marks location, dative (=nʔ) – the final point of motion, ablative (=χVdʔ/=γVdʔ/=kVdʔ) – the starting point of motion, and proactive (=wna/=mna) is used for path.

The main meaning of the dative case in Nenets is to designate the final point of motion, as in Khanty. Consider some examples with intransitive verbs:

- physical motion: direction towards the final point :
χarda=χani (house=DAT/POSS) t'udmʔ « (I) entered my house » (horizontal); jam=dʔ (sea=DAT/Sg) seja « (S/He) drowned in (Lit.: into) the sea » (vertical – immersion);
- mental motion :
irija=nʔ (moon=DAT/Sg) sirja
« (S/He) looks at the moon » (visual);
maña? ñanda (3/Sg/DAT) inzelenguwa?
« We shall listen to him » (aural);
- emotion :
ŋamge=nʔ (what=DAT/Sg) piŋŋan?
« What are you laughing for? ».

Still there is a difference between these two languages : the Nenets dative case expresses not only the direction, but it also implies the notion of location at the destination point.

There are some verbs in Nenets with lexical meaning of location, which take a dative argument :

t'iki ja=n? (place=DAT/Sg) *liḡarej?*

« (S/He) is hiding in this place »;

ḡarda=ḡanda (house=DAT/POSS) *mal?ma?ḡejad?*

« Everybody got together in his house » ;

noḡo jaḡo=ḡonda (trap=DAT/POSS) *jerem'as*

« Polar fox is trapped into a trap »;

t'uku ja=n? (place=DAT/Sg) *maraḡḡa? ḡokawna wad'owi?*

« A lot of cloudberry grew up in this place. »

In these examples the dynamic meaning of the dative case contradicts to some extent the static lexical meaning of the verb. It is well known that in order to be combined, two elements have to share some common components in their semantics. Such constructions as these are possible because both the verb and the dative case share the semantic commonality of location. This connotation lies on the periphery of each of their meanings but still there is a point of intersection.

This fact results in quite a different set of figurative meanings of the Nenets dative case, derived both from components of destination and location.

From the meaning of location the temporal meaning is derived :

t'uku manzaja=m?s'id'a jal'a=n? (two day=DAT/Sg) *me=wa?*

« (We) took this work for two days ».

From the meaning of destination a meaning of unpremeditated action is derived :

le=n? (bone=DAT/Sg) *ḡacej?ḡu?*

« He has nearly choked with (Lit.: to) a bone ».

Prototypical spatial meaning is obvious if we compare the two following examples :

ḡārta tuḡi=ḡinda (rifle=DAT/POSS) *jādarej?*

« He wounded himself with (Lit.: to) his own rifle » (accidentally) ;
ḡārta tuḡi=ḡidanda (rifle=INSTR/POSS) *jādarej?* « He wounded himself with his own rifle » (on purpose).

The dative case with transitive verbs has the same meanings as in Khanty :

displacement (physical transfer): *ḡesi=ḡinda?* (village=DAT/POSS) *ḡoka jam? tewra?*

« (They) brought a lot of flour to our village » ;

jurt'a ḡid'a=n? (cup=DAT/Sg) *ḡamdada* « S/He poured butter into the cup » ;

... social transfer of a material object (« giving »): [*ḡarar ḡan'ana ḡa?* « Where is your knife ? »] *wesako=n?* (man=DAT/Sg) *mit* « (I) gave (it) to the old man » ;

... mental transfer of information :

[*tad tikaḡad m'akan? todamz'*

« After this I came home ».]

n'is'a=ḡan (father=DAT/POSS) *tarem? madm? :* « *ḡopoj n'awam? vadadm?* »

« I told my father this : « I killed one hare ».

2.1. Conclusions on the Nenets dative case

In Nenets, the dative case combines the notions of destination and location in the place of destination as a result of previous movement. The boundary between two loci is crossed or doesn't exist at all. The cases in Nenets directly mark semantic roles and this explains many of the figurative meanings, which can derive both from the semantic component of destination (unpremeditated action) and from the semantic component of location (time and causation).

2.2. Khanty and Nenets constructions with secondary predicates

In Khanty and Nenets, the dative case prototypically has the same meaning : destination of motion. These languages are different in referring to the *boundary* of the motion. The Khanty dative case

implies approaching a goal, *not* crossing the boundary of its location. In Nenets, the meaning of the dative case implies approaching *and* crossing the boundary. This distinction gives rise to different sets of figurative meanings both in constructions with primary and secondary predicates.

In Khanty, a secondary predicate in the dative case expresses purpose :

mūj pewəλ=tij=a (swim=INF=DAT) *mānsəw*
« We went to swim ».

Temporal meaning is expressed by the locative case, and derives from the locative meaning in constructions with primary predicates :

mān=t=em=n (go=PrP=1/Sg=LOC) *ma lōḡatλ'aləm*
Lit. : « At my going, I will come to you ».

In Nenets, the main function of the dative case in constructions with secondary predicates is to express a temporal relation between two events :

t'iki soḡo?χe=wa=n? (come=VN=DAT/Sg) *ḡewad'aromawa?*
« When we came up to that hill, we stopped ».

The other meaning, which derives from the temporal meaning, is causal :

wen'ekoda ma=da=n? (bark=PrP=DAT) *warkar s'idi*
« A bear got up from (Lit.: to) the dog's barking ».

The extension of the prototypical meaning of the dative case in Khanty and Nenets constructions with secondary predicates gives opposite results : in Khanty it leads to purpose, while in Nenets it leads to a casual meaning. The starting point is practically the same, but the results are very different, because these two languages treat the concept of a boundary between two locums in a different way.

Table 3

The meaning of dative and locative in constructions with secondary predicates

Case	Nenets	Khanty
LOC	Spatial	Temporal
DAT	Temporal Causal	Purpose

3. Spatial relationships in the Tungusic languages

NEGIDAL

In Negidal, the system of locative cases consists of locative (=la/=dula), dative (=du/=tu), lative (=tki), ablative (*dukkoj/=tukkoj*) and prolative (=li/=duli).

The dative with intransitive verbs expresses location :

taj utān=du (house=DAT) *bilčāwun*
« (We) began to live in this house ».

With transitive verbs it means the final point of displacement :

tixen omōčīn=du=j (boat=DAT=POSS) *tewujen žaxalba*
« At that time he had put his belongings in his boat ».

The dative in this sentence presupposes that the belongings are already *in* the boat. In spite of the dynamic meaning of the verb dative has static meaning of location.

The dative with verbs of giving denotes a recipient :

goxoji žawača ge=du=j (friend=DAT=POSS) *buča*
« (He) caught his hook and gave it to his friend ».

(Now the friend has the hook.) Social transfer in such sentences is reinterpreted so that the transferred item results in being at someone else's disposal.

So the main meaning of the dative in Negidal is to express location with different types of predicates, both static and dynamic.

The locative case in Negidal expresses physical motion toward the point of destination :

gojopti utān=**dulā** (hut=LOC) esčāwun
« (We) reached the old hut ».

The main function of the Negidal lative case is to express mental motion :

tadukkaj ge=**tki**=j (friend=LAT=POSS) ičedgim
« Then I looked at my friend » ;

and transfer of information :

« žulgidaduwn takan bisin », ge=**tki**=j (friend=LAT=POSS) gunem
« There is a snag in front of us », I told my friend.

3.1. Conclusions regarding the Negidal spatial cases

In Negidal, there are two dynamic spatial cases, which differ as to the domains in which motion or displacement is carried out : locative is the case of motion in the physical domain, while lative is the case of motion in the mental domain.

The dative denotes a static spatial relationship – location, which includes location per se and location as a result of previous motion or transfer in physical or social domains.

Table 4

Locative cases in Negidal

Case	Static	Dynamic	
	DAT	LOC	LAT
Meaning	Location	Physical motion and displacement	Mental motion and displacement

EVENKI

The most complicated system of spatial cases is represented in the Evenki language. The Evenki system consists of a set of 8 cases :

dative (=du/=tu), lative (=tki), locative (=la/=le/=lo/=dula/=dule-
/=dulo/=tula/=tule/=tulo), lative-locative (=kla/=kle/=klo), elative
(=duk/=tuk), ablativ (=git/=kit/=ŋid), prolative (=li/=duli/=tuli), lative-
prolative (=kli).

According to their meanings they form four groups : 1) location is expressed by dative, 2) destination is expressed by lative, locative, and lative-locative, 3) starting point is expressed by elative and ablativ, 4) path is expressed by prolative and lative-prolative.

The difference among cases in every group is determined by the domain in which motion is carried out, and by the interpretation of the notion of a boundary.

As in Negidal, the dative expresses location with static and dynamic verbs :

nidim=**du** daptun=**du**=n (Nidym=DAT mouth=DAT=POSS/3Sg) urinav
« We setted a camp at the mouth of the river Nidym » ;
amatatyn d'ukte=**du** (two people=DAT) n'urilva byren
« Their grandfather gave arrows to both of them ».

The locative case is the most frequent means to express the final point of movement or transfer in the physical domain :

ulguki mo=**la** (tree=LOC) tuktyren
« A chipmunk climbed a tree » (intransitive sentence) ;
pastuxil nuŋarvatyn d'u=**la**=ver (hut=LOC=POSS) tasisilipkil
« Shepherds hurry them (reindeers) to cabins » (transitive sentence).

The lative case is used for motion in the physical domain if a final point of motion is not reached or specified :

tyrgakakin bira=**tki** (river=LAT) ollomosinav
« At noon (we) went to the river for fishing ».

It is regularly used to express mental movement :

bi nuŋan=tyki=n (he=LAT=Sg) *ičesinem*

« I looked at him » ;

or to express some other kinds of figurative meanings :

tar beje togo=tki (fire=LAT) *χuvullen*

« That man started to blow to the fire ».

The lative-locative case, expressing destination, denotes location in front of or opposite some place :

togo=klo (fire=LAT-LOC) *tegekel*

« Sit down by the fire ».

These three cases, denoting destination in the physical domain, interpret the notion of a boundary in different ways. Locative means that the boundary of the locum is crossed and an object is located inside it. Lative-locative means that movement has stopped near the place of destination and its boundary isn't crossed. Lative denotes direction in general.

Locative and lative-locative are together opposed to lative, which can express motion in the mental domain. The lative's abstract meaning in the physical domain (destination in general) coincides with its meaning « transmission of information », which doesn't presuppose location at a concrete final point.

Starting point of movement is expressed by two cases. Elative denotes that movement or transfer starts *inside* the locum :

Bejel mosa=duk (forest=ELAT) *suručetyn*

« Men left the forest » ;

asi be=duk (cradle=ELAT) *kuŋakanmi gačan*

« A woman took a child from the cradle ».

Elative has a wide set of different meanings, including source of information :

si eva amin=duk=iv (father=ELAT=POSS) *χanŋuktačas?*

« What have you asked my father about? »

and cause of emotion :

bi χomoty=duk (bear=ELAT) *sot ŋelelčev*

« I was very frightened by a bear ».

Ablative has more definite meaning and denotes that physical movement starts *outside* the locum :

asatkan d'u=git (hut=ABL) *ŋenederen*

« A girl is coming from the cabin ».

The opposition between elative and ablative is based on the same notion of a boundary: elative means that a boundary is crossed in the process of movement, while ablative means that the starting point of movement lies outside the guiding line.

Prolative and lative-prolative denote path and reveal the similar distribution of meanings. Prolative has a wide range of meanings in different domains, including :

- path of physical movement : *bejumnil χokto=li* (road=PROLAT) *ŋenedečetyn* « Hunters went along the road » ;
- path of mental movement (acoustic or visual perception) : *bu garal sigdyle=duli=tyn* (branch=PROLAT=POSS) *motyva ičečevun* « We saw an elk through branches of a tree » ;
- topic of conversation : *bi evenkil bini=li=tyn* (life=PROLAT=POSS) *ulgučendeŋev* « I'll tell you how Evenki live ».

Lative-prolative denotes movement along the boundary of a locum: *bi dety=kli* (tundra=LAT-PROLAT) *darimasinim* « I go around tundra along its boundaries ».

3.2. Conclusions concerning the Evenki spatial cases

The spatial case system in Evenki is represented by a set of contrasting cases. The more general meaning a case has, the more figurative meanings it produces. In each contrasting pair, one case has a very concrete spatial meaning, while the other extends figurative meanings to different domains – mental or emotional.

4. Summary

Spatial cases in the Uralic languages of Siberia have very general meanings; concrete spatial relationships are expressed by postpositions. In the Tungusic languages, postpositions are not numerous, and spatial cases express different spatial relationships unambiguously.

The main function of the dative case in the Uralic and the Tungusic languages is to describe spatial relationships. Terminology spatial relations in these languages is controversial. In the Uralic languages, the term «dative» is used for dynamic processes and refers to the destination of motion. In the Tungusic languages, the same term is used for static process and designates location.

In the Uralic languages, there is no difference in expressing motion in different domains. In the Tungusic languages, the locative case grammaticalizes motion in the physical domain; the lative case grammaticalizes motion in the mental domain.

Table 5
Spatial relationships in the Uralic and the Tungusic languages

Meaning		Tungusic	Uralic
Static		DAT	LOC
Dynamic	Physical domain	LOC	DAT
	Mental domain	LAT	

In all the languages, the dative case reveals specific extensions depending on the core meaning. There is only one domain, in which functions of the dative case coincide in all the languages – this is the domain of *giving*, which, after all, is where the dative case gets its name.

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