



Aspects of the Grammar of Tundra Yukaghir
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Summary

The present thesis is an attempt at a grammatical description of Tundra Yukaghir (TY), a minority language spoken in north-eastern Russia. The thesis consists of an introduction and chapters dedicated to phonology, morphology, syntax and information structure.

In the introduction, constituting the first chapter of the thesis, the genetic and ethno-linguistic issues are in focus. TY is identified as one of the two surviving Yukaghir languages, the other being Kolyma Yukaghir. Both languages are most probably remotely linked to the Uralic family although they are sometimes considered language isolates. For sociolinguistic reasons it is hard to identify dialects within TY. Tentatively, the eastern Khalarcha dialect and the western Olyora dialect of TY can be posited. The ethnonym ‘Yukaghir’ is not an autonym. Rather it is of Tungusic provenience since it displays the suffix *-gir*, typical for Tungusic tribal names. Speakers of TY call themselves *wadun čii* (sg. *wadul*). This designation is assumed to derive from the reconstructed stem **wad-* ‘firm’, ‘strong’. Yukaghirs are autochthonous inhabitants of north-eastern Siberia, who once occupied a huge area between the Lena River and the upper reaches of the river Anadyr. Latitudinally, they might have dwelled from as far as the river Vitim in the south to the coast of the North Polar Sea. Tungusic peoples contributed considerably to the ethnogenesis of TY speakers and to their lexicon although the exact extent of the latter is yet to be established. Nowadays the area inhabited by speakers of TY is greatly restricted. Most of them live in just three settlements in the Nizhnekolymsk district and the nearby tundra. The major source of income for Yukaghirs residing there are activities associated with reindeer herding. Fishing and sewing are important supplementary means of subsistence. TY is a heavily endangered language with only around 60 speakers left, whose linguistic competence varies. The language has almost ceased to be passed on to children. Impressionistically, only seniors over 60 years of age possess full command of the language. Hardly anyone of them is monolingual in TY. One of the important factors leading to the decline of TY in modern times is the fact that its speakers live in multiethnic settlements and do not form a majority there having to speak the local *lingue franche*, Russian and Yakut, in order to be able to communicate with inhabitants from other linguistic groups. It is maintained by the author that the lack of necessity to speak TY in these communities is the crucial factor for the moribund state of TY at present since the possibility to speak TY and transmit it to younger generations, which is there for a few decades at least, is far from being fully taken advantage of by TY speakers, as many of them deem the knowledge of TY an unnecessary luxury.

The introduction ends with a note on the spelling and glossing system adopted in the thesis, preceded by a section on methodology, which stresses the importance of typological considerations in descriptive linguistics and provides a specification of primary data sources studied.

Chapter 2 treats TY phonology. It opens with a phonemic inventory arrived at on the basis of the existence of minimal pairs. TY has 14 vowels, 4 out of which are diphthongs, and 21 consonants. The most important positional restriction concerns voiced obstruents. They are prohibited in coda position. In onsets they can occur primarily only word-internally while word-initially they are always a result of voicing. The main adjacency

restrictions are on the existence of hiatus and onset consonant clusters. Coda consonant clusters are allowed. A fairly wide range of syllable types is encountered. A number of properties, e.g. high degree of syllable complexity paired with TY being a head-final language, make the TY syllable typologically interesting. There are traces of vowel harmony. (Sub)sets of vowels often harmonize along the parameters of backness and rounding. The domain in which the harmony is more or less consistently observed are the two first syllables of a root. Exceptions from the vowel harmony rule exist and are numerous if the first syllable is closed. The significance of the prosodic foot is discussed and it is demonstrated that this concept does not provide a universal tool to explain the registered phonological phenomena unequivocally. The phonological alternations either stem from phonological restrictions, e.g. hiatus and consonant cluster resolution, or are assimilatory: (de)voicing. The morphophonemic alternations affect vowels and consonants equally. Vowels experience (de)diphthongization, lengthening, shortening, deletion and dis-/assimilation. Among consonant alternations the /j/-related alternations are prominent since [j] is the first sound of many verbal endings and is subject to the largest number of adjacency restrictions among consonants. The main strategy applied in case of /j/-related alternations is coalescence, sometimes accompanied or replaced by affrication. Other morphophonemic alternations of consonants are deletion and dis-/assimilation. The application of some rules presupposes the application of some other rules, thus rule ordering obtains. Stress is a controversial topic. Some syllables do seem to have a measurable prominence compared to others, however no decisive answer could be proposed to explain the regularities of stress assignment. Stress appears to be phonologically irrelevant. Two specific intonation patterns can be distinguished: that of polarity questions and of declaratives with verb or argument focus. Chapter 2 concludes with a short section on the orthography employed to render TY in writing.

Chapter 3, dealing with morphology, takes up the most part of the thesis. First a general morphological characteristic of TY is given. It is predominantly agglutinating with considerable traces of inflectional behavior. It is neither exclusively head- nor dependent marking. The predominant morphological process in TY is suffixation. Stem modification and suppletion are attested. Compounding is not uncommon. The following parts of speech can be identified: noun, verb, pronoun, adjective, adverb, postposition, conjunction, and particle.

Nouns inflect for 11 cases (nominative, accusative, absolutive, ergative, genitive, dative, instrumental, locative, ablative, prolative and comitative), number (singular and plural) and may carry the pertensive suffix indicating being possessed by a possessor in the third person. Nouns are formed by means of suffixation, conversion and compounding.

Verbs can be divided into subclasses: action, qualitative, quantitative and denominal verbs as well as one deictic verb. Verbs inflect for person (1, 2, 3), number (singular, plural), (in)transitivity, TAM and focus type (argument focus, predicate focus and adjunct focus). Only a future and a non-future tense are distinguished. The aspectual system with its 8 values (inchoative, durative, habitual, semelfactive, iterative, resultative, proximative and periphrastic perfective) is rather rich. Equally differentiated is the mode system: indicative, potential, imperative, jussive, hortative, desiderative, inclinative, prospective, obligative and non-visual. Modal verbs are, however, scarce. The non-finite verb forms are represented by 3 participles and 5 converbs. The voice system comprises 5

values (active, passive, causative, reflexive and reciprocal). A number of (de)transitivizing suffixes exist. The verb has affective forms with diminutive, augmentative and commiserative values. Compounding is much less productive than with nouns.

TY has personal, possessive, demonstrative, interrogative, negative and indefinite pronouns as well as universal quantifiers. Special forms of possessive pronouns exist only in the third person. In the five-way system of demonstrative pronouns there are attributive and independent forms. The latter occur in three series with varying functional scope.

Basic adjectives are confined to the words for 'big' and 'small' and have no degree of comparison. Relational adjectives are commonly derived by the genitive case ending and a special relational suffix.

Adverbs fall into three groups: attributive, circumstantial and relational. Attributive adverbs can, in turn, be further subdivided into manner, degree and quantitative adverbs, while circumstantial adverbs are represented by spatial and temporal adverbs. The derivational base for manner adverbs is the 3SG form of the verb.

Postpositions display many nominal characteristics and could be regarded as a subgroup of nouns. While there are 4 basic postpositions, most postpositions are derived from, partly obsolete, nominal stems. Two functionally postposition-like items are interpreted as petrified converbs.

Conjunctions are not numerous since TY is mainly a chaining language. There are copulative, adversative and disjunctive coordinating conjunctions. Subordinating conjunctions are represented by temporal, conditional, causal, consecutive and comparative conjunctions.

TY is very rich in particles, both original and borrowed from Yakut. They convey modal shades of meaning or emphasis, serve as deictic devices, discourse markers or interjections.

Chapter 4 presents TY syntax. In its three sections the noun phrase, simple sentence and complex sentence are presented successively. The word order in a noun phrase can be described by the formula DEM/POSS NUM ADJ HEAD, where NUM stands for numeric bases equivalent to numerals in other languages and realized as participles, while ADJ, subsumes alongside adjectives proper, attributively used verb forms, i.e. participles. A NP can be modified by another NP in a possessive construction or in an instance of apposition. A possessive relation can be marked on the head, the modifier or remain unmarked. Marking of the possessive relation on the dependent is rather infrequent and is normally reserved for human possessors. With hosts denoting inanimate referents the genitive case ending acquires a derivational value and forms relational adjectives. Various marking constellations emerge when a possessive construction is embedded in another possessive construction. Both the head noun and the modifier can occur in apposition. Modifiers do not agree with their head. Coordination of NPs is achieved by means of juxtaposition, the comitative case ending or a copulative conjunction. Modifiers can be coordinated too.

The basic word order in a simple clause is SO(X)V. Deviations from this order are normally dictated by pragmatic considerations. They can be roughly subdivided into instances of left and right dislocation, with the predicate being the pivot. Both core

arguments as well as adjuncts can occur postverbally and then denote reactivated referents or concepts, they serve to focalize a constituent with syntactic means. Left dislocation is meant for topicalization of constituents other than the subject or for emphasis. Question words typically occupy the clause final position, but can be found clause-initially or, though rarely, clause-internally. The alignment system is characterized by ergativity splits. The primary split is conditioned by the pragmatic status of the core argument. When focal, it follows the ergative pattern, otherwise the accusative one. A secondary split depends on the place of the argument in the person hierarchy. Third person pronouns show neutral alignment under focus. When non-focal, the alignment of both pronominal and nominal third person arguments is either neutral (if the subject is an interlocutor) or accusative (if the subject is a non-interlocutor). Since only one core argument of a clause can be focalized, the pragmatically conditioned split is trans-clausal. Non-verbal predicates belong to three semantic subclasses distinguished on the basis of the copular devices – a copula and three copular verbs – employed to form them. The meanings are distributed among the copular devices as follows:

- identification, equation
- existence, location, possession
- comparison

Verbal predicates act as nuclei of intransitive, including zero-place predicates such as meteorological verbs, transitive, ditransitive and semi-transitive clauses. The latter can be of two types. The first type is represented by intransitive verbs taking two arguments. The second type is engendered by the pragmatic split leading to a constellation in which a transitive predicate takes two arguments with ‘incompatible’ case endings: nominative and absolutive or ergative and accusative. Sentence types include declaratives, interrogatives, imperatives in the broad sense and exclamatives. Declarative sentences exhibit 6 morpho-syntactic patterns depending on the focus type and (in)transitivity. A peculiarity of declarative sentences under negation is that transitive verbs undergo a formal detransitivization unless the direct object is in the focus of the utterance. In interrogative sentences a special interrogative conjugation is employed systematically only with intransitive verbs and under adjunct focus. Otherwise the morpho-syntactic pattern is the same as in a corresponding declarative sentence. Obligatory detransitivization does not take place in negative polarity question. Imperative sentences, except for jussives, normally lack a subject. The negative imperative makes a combined use of the common verbal negator and a prohibitive suffix. Exclamatives differ from declaratives in that they are introduced by corresponding particles. Verbs agree with their subjects in person and number although discrepancies in number are attested, the verb having the plural form and the subject being in singular. Apart from that verbs agree with the focalized constituent irrespective of its syntactic function, giving rise to different focus agreement patterns. Impersonal constructions are encoded as subjectless clauses with the predicate in 3PL or as having the noun *köde* ‘person’ as their subject.

Under the label ‘complex sentences’ complement clauses, adverbial clauses, relative clauses and compound sentences are discussed. Complements can be both reduced (gerunds or converbs) and sentence-like. No complementizers are employed. Complements can be taken by some intransitive verbs despite their only argument

position being already filled. Among the speech reporting strategies, a special case of complementation, direct speech greatly prevails over indirect speech. Adverbial clauses can be linked to the main clause with the help of a conjunction or, more frequently, have conjunctionless junction. In the latter case all non-final predicates of a sentence are represented by either converbs (in the case of co-referential subjects) or locative case forms of gerunds (in the case of disjoint reference). Switch-reference is semantically determined; however, strict semantic considerations can be overridden by pragmatic ones. Due to the sameness of the formal apparatus for encoding adverbial clauses they are often ambiguous as far as the semantic relation between their predicate and the predicate of the main clause is concerned. The following semantic relations can be expressed: temporal, conditional, causal, consecutive, final, concessive and comparative. Relative clauses are normally realized as participles or gerunds. They are presented with reference to the parameters of orientation and presence of a head. Headless relative clauses can be interpreted as possessive constructions. As for the criterion of restrictiveness, only focal gerundial forms, and probably *-me*-participles, are sensitive to it and consistently render restrictive relative clauses. Occasionally, interrogative pronouns serve as relativizers. Clauses can be coordinated both via a conjunction and without one. In the latter case, the co-referentiality of the subjects and identical focal patterns are chosen as diagnostic properties to distinguish compound sentences from a juxtaposition of unrelated simple sentences. The following types of compound sentences can be identified: copulative, adversative, disjunctive, explanatory, contrastive and additive.

Chapter 6 concludes the thesis describing the organization of information structure in TY. Unlike topic, focus profoundly affects the morpho-syntactic shape of a clause determining the choice of a conjugational paradigm and conditioning the alignment split. The focus type is marked on both predicate and core arguments. Different focal patterns are presented in terms of focus articulations, which are combinatory possibilities of constituents carrying given and new information. Three hierarchies are established that describe the preferential tendencies for marking a certain constituent as the focus of the sentence in those cases in which there is more than one candidate:

- $X_F > V_F$
- in non-thetic sentences: $O_F < A_F/V_F$
- in thetic sentences: $V_F > S_F$ and less consistent but tendentially $V_F > A_F/O_F$

In most cases the topic remains unmarked and does not exert any influence upon the morpho-syntactic properties of a clause. There are dedicated markers to express a contrastive topic, though. Focal topics, especially in so called relative presentative sentences, do receive the focus marker. The exponent of contrast coincides with that of focus. Apart from marking focus and contrast, these markers can indicate emphasis alone. Deviations from the overall focus system are observed. Some of them are systematic in younger speakers and can be taken as signs of the incepting erosion of the sophisticated focus system still employed by senior speakers.