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Challenging theory: spatial deixis in Nivkh

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1. INTRODUCTION

Linguistic typology is known to be a very effective tool for analysing particular languages. On the other hand, almost every newly described language presents at least some data that can hardly be satisfactorily analyzed within the scope of existing theories. These uncomfortable and exceptional facts are the best testing ground for a theory (cf. McGregor 2003: 130). Rarely, however, is theory able to accommodate all empirical facts from a wide variety of languages; rather a theory should be constructed in such a way that would allow, if necessary, its potential broadening in different directions. Nevertheless, typologists sometimes forget about caution and start to draw final theoretical conclusions based on representative, but still limited language data. As a result, not infrequently descriptive linguists run into language facts that are not only inconsistent with a theory, but directly contradict its ideas.

As an illustration, the paper examines such typological generalisations for deixis as the number of possible distance contrasts and the sensitivity to the position of the addressee in the light of the deictic system of Nivkh, a moribund language spoken in several dialects by ca. 500 people of the older generation in the Far East of Russia. Nivkh is not related to any other language and is considered to be the only surviving indigenous language in the area. Conventionally, it is included into the group of Paleosiberian languages. Typologically, Nivkh is an agglutinating nominative synthetic language with SOV word order (cf. Gruzdeva 2003, Mattissen 2003). The paper is based on the data from the East-Sakhalin dialect collected during my fieldwork on Sakhalin Island in 1989, 1991, and 2000.

Nivkh belongs to a typologically rare set of languages that have an extremely elaborated and complex deictic system for the expression of spatial reference (cf. Krejnovich 1960, 1986, Panfilov 1965, Beffa 1985, Gruzdeva 2007). Nivkh deictically contrastive words (= demonstratives) belong to different morphosyntactic categories and encode various characterizing (object/person vs. location) and relational (quality, quantity, and size) features of a referent (cf. Hanks 1990, Himmelmann 1996: 210, Diessel 1999: 4, Dixon 2003: 61). The deictic system in Nivkh is organised hierarchically and may be divided into primary and secondary systems, both of which are distance-oriented (cf. Bühler 1982: 13–20, Anderson and Keenan 1985: 282). The use of both systems is typical only of locational demonstrative pronouns which are in the focus of the present study and whose structure is presented in the section 2. The section 3 deals with the primary deictic system that encodes the distance of the referent to a deictic centre represented by a speaker. It is indicated through different demonstrative roots, which have common initials and from which various types of demonstratives are derived. The section 4 considers the secondary deictic system

that denotes the distance of the referent to the initial border of the area set up by the deictic root and is encoded by different deictic suffixes. In the section 5, I summarize the results and show that Nivkh deictic system refutes some proposed universals and general claims about deixis.

2. THE STRUCTURE OF LOCATIONAL DEMONSTRATIVE PRONOUNS

Locational demonstrative pronouns (hereafter locational demonstratives or simply demonstratives) use the deictic specification for location reference. The corresponding terms presented in the Table 1 have one of the following structures:

- (a) DEICTIC ROOT + suffix $-s^1/-kř^2$,
- (b) DEICTIC ROOT + suffix $-s/-kř$ + suffix $-ηa$,
- (c) DEICTIC ROOT + suffix $-s/-kř$ + suffix $-ηa$ + suffix $-jo$.

Table 1
Nivkh locational demonstrative pronouns

	DISTANCE TO THE SPEAKER (PRIMARY DEICTIC SYSTEM)	TYPE OF LOCATION	DISTANCE TO INITIAL BORDER OF A SPATIAL AREA (SECONDARY DEICTIC SYSTEM)		
			close	medial	distal
1	‘proximal’ (root <i>tu-</i>)	precise	<i>tu-s</i>	<i>tu-z-ηa</i>	<i>tu-z-ηa-jo</i>
		directional	<i>tu-kř</i>	<i>tu-kr-ηa</i>	<i>tu-kr-ηa-jo</i>
2	‘close’ (root <i>hu-</i>)	precise	<i>hu-s</i>	<i>hu-z-ηa</i>	<i>hu-z-ηa-jo</i>
		directional	<i>hu-kř</i>	<i>hu-kr-ηa</i>	<i>hu-kr-ηa-jo</i>
3	‘medial’ (root <i>eγ-</i>)	precise	<i>eγ-s</i>	<i>eγ-z-ηa</i>	<i>eγ-z-ηa-jo</i>
		directional	<i>e-kř</i>	<i>e-kr-ηa</i>	<i>e-kr-ηa-jo</i>
4	‘remote’ (root <i>au-/a-</i>)	precise	<i>au-s</i>	<i>au-z-ηa</i>	<i>au-z-ηa-jo</i>
		directional	<i>a-kř</i>	<i>a-kr-ηa</i>	<i>a-kr-ηa-jo</i>
5	‘distal’ (root <i>aiγ-/ai-</i>)	precise	<i>aiγ-s</i>	<i>aiγ-z-ηa</i>	<i>aiγ-z-ηa-jo</i>
		directional	[?] <i>ai-kř</i> ³	[?] <i>ai-kr-ηa</i>	[?] <i>ai-kr-ηa-jo</i>

A deictic root encoding a distance of location to the speaker, i.e. a primary deictic system (cf. section 3.1), obligatorily attaches either the suffix $-s$ or the suffix $-kř$, each of those marks a certain type of location (cf. section 3.2). Morphosyntactically, these terms can be considered nominal forms: they can be used independently in argument positions of verbs, can constitute a part of a polysynthetic complex and inflect for nominative and locative cases in the same way as nouns. However, apart from prototypical nominal forms they do not inflect

¹ The suffix $-s$ becomes voiced before $-η$.

² Some of my informants pronounce this suffix with the velar q , i.e. $-qř$. The final consonant of the suffix $-kř$ becomes voiced before $-η$. The suffix may lose its final consonant when the demonstrative takes the dative suffix $-toχ/-roχ/-doχ$.

³ Directional ‘distal’ demonstratives are not attested in my data.

either for other cases or for number. Moreover, even being used in argument position of verbs, they primarily indicate the location of an event expressed by a verb and function more like adverbial modifiers.


Furthermore, locational demonstratives may additionally attach either the suffix *-ŋa* or the suffix *-ŋa* in combination with the suffix *-jo* (placed immediately after the suffixes *-s* or *-kř*). These additional suffixes serve as the markers of a secondary deictic system that defines a distance of location to the initial border of the spatial area set up by the deictic root of a demonstrative (cf. section 4).

3. THE PRIMARY DEICTIC SYSTEM

3.1. *The semantics of deictic roots*

The semantic basis of the primary deictic system is a five-term contrast along the horizontal dimension of the distance to the speaker. The speaker has a clear conception of the surrounding space, which is divided into quite easily identifiable radial areas: once the location lies in one or another area, it can be referred to by a locational demonstrative with the corresponding deictic root, cf. the Figure 1.

Figure 1
Deictic roots encoding the primary deictic system

	‘proximal area’ <i>tu-</i>) ‘close area’ <i>hu-</i>) ‘medial area’ <i>ey-/e-</i>) ‘remote area’ <i>au-/a-</i>) ‘distal area’ <i>aiγ-</i>
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These demonstratives are often accompanied by gestures, glances or intonation, functioning in a ‘gestural’ way: demonstratives indicating more distant referents are pronounced with the prolonged intonation.

The ‘proximal’ demonstrative with the root *tu-* encodes a location in the spatial area immediately around the speaker⁴, cf. (1). The objects located in this area can be touched or taken into the hands (cf. Krejnovich 1960: 89).⁵

⁴ In the recent studies (cf. e.g. Enfield 2003) this area is considered as a speaker’s engagement area, which is, at moment *t*, the conceived site of a speaker’s currently dominant manual and attentional engagement.

⁵ The abbreviations used in this paper are 1SG = first-person singular, 2SG = second-person singular, 3SG = third-person singular, ABL = ablative, CAUS = causative, CONV = converb, DAT = dative, FOC = focus, IMP = imperative, IND = indicative, INSTR = instrumental, INTER = interrogative, MAN = manner, MOD = modal, PERL = perlativ, PL = plural, PROGR = progressive, REFL = reflexive.

- (1) *T'i t'as—qo-d?* *Ñi tus—qo-d⁶.*
 you what.place—hurt-IND I precise.proximal.place—hurt-IND
 'What place does [it] hurt? [It] hurts in this (proximal) place.'

It seems that the speaker cannot use this pronoun in a wider sense, meaning a place or an area outside the 'proximal area', e.g. 'here, in my village' or 'here, on earth', as it is typical of some other languages (cf. Laury 1997: 59).

The 'close' demonstrative with the root *hu-* indicates a location at a moderate distance from the speaker. Persons or objects located in the 'close area' cannot be touched but should be pointed at (cf. Krejnovich 1960: 89). From the example (2), one can conclude that something is going on in the close area relative to the speaker's location and this event causes everyone to look in the corresponding direction:

- (2) *Sikm huk-tox* *t'ar-d-yun.*
 all place.in.direction.toward.close.area-DAT look-IND-PL
 'Everyone looked in that direction (toward close area).'

The 'medial' demonstrative with the root *eγ-/e-* refers to a location which can be rather distant both from the speaker and the addressee but is still visible to them.

- (3) *Eγs—p i-ř* *ř'o—maγ-d.*
 precise.medial.place—be-CONV:MAN.3SG fish—prepare-IND
 'Being in that (medial) place, [she] prepares fish.'

The 'remote' demonstrative with the root *au-/a-*, cf. (4), and the 'distal' one with the root *aiγ-*, cf. (5), denote locations far away and even farther away from the speaker respectively, in the areas which may be already invisible to him. In case the place is located at the horizon, it can be referred to only by the 'distal' demonstrative with the root *aiγ-*.

- (4) *Qanη—t'u—ñaqř* *akr-uγe* *p'řə-d.*
 dog—sledge—one place.in.direction.toward.remote.area-PERL come-IND
 'A dog sledge came from the place in that direction (toward remote area).'

- (5) *Aiγz-ux* *taf* *jiv-d-ra.*
 precise.distal.place-ABL house be-IND-FOC
 'There is a house in that (distal) place.'

⁶ In the examples, the units of polysynthetic complexes are separated by a dash, while morphemes are divided by a hyphen.

As one can see, the primary five-term deictic system is not sensitive to the position of the addressee, which is rather unusual cross-linguistically, since according to (Diessel 2005: 6), ‘the four- and five-term systems are always person-oriented, i.e. one of demonstratives denotes a referent in the proximity of the hearer’.

3.2. *The types of location*

Basically, there are two types of location that are specified by locational demonstratives: (i) a precise location, marked by the suffix *-s* (cf. section 3.2.1), and (ii) a non-precise directional location, marked by the suffix *-kʸ* (cf. section 3.2.2).

3.2.1. *Precise location*

A precise location is characterized by more or less clear boundaries. Typically, it is a specific spatial point or a specific spatial area which can be easily and precisely identified both by the speaker and the addressee. This type of location is encoded by the demonstrative forms with the suffix *-s*.

In the example (6), the speaker shows the addressee a seam, which was sewed up, whereas in the example (7) she points at her own house. Each of the locational demonstratives used by the speaker refers to a specific place that can be seen and thus identified without any difficulties by both participants of the speech situation.

- (6) *P*’-larq-ux t’az-ara j-ot-t?
REFL-dress-ABL what.place-INTER 3SG-sew-IND

Tuz-ux t’oʃ’f toq-ku-t
precise.proximal.place-ABL seam come.unstitched-CAUS-
CONV:MAN:1SG

j-ot-t.

3SG-sew-IND

‘In which place did you sew up your dress? [Because] the seam became unstitched, [I] sewed it up in this (proximal) place.’

- (7) *T*’i t’as—p’i-d? Ñi hus—p’i-d.
you what.place—be-IND I precise.close.place—be-IND
‘What place do you live in? I live in that (close) place.’

In the following example (8), the speaker points at the precise place, where the dogs were running and from which they ran away:

- (8) *Eγz-ux* *qanη-gun* *ve-t*
 precise.medial.place-ABL dog-PL run-CONV:MAN:3PL
- t'ak-toχ-pəřk-lu* *vi-d-γun.*
 what.direction-DAT-only-MOD go-IND-PL
 ‘Running in that (medial) place, the dogs ran away somewhere.’

In the situation presented in the example (9), the speaker and the addressee can hardly see the place referred to by the locational demonstrative *au-s* ‘a precise remote place’. However, both participants of the speech situation are supposed to be able to identify the place where the tree used to grow since it is precisely marked by the stump:

- (9) *Auz-ux* *‡'χař* *kəpr-ř* *hunv-ux*
 precise.remote.place-ABL tree stand-CONV:MAN:3SG place-ABL
os—pəřk *hunv-nd.*
 stump—only be-IND
 ‘There is only a stump on that (remote) place where the tree used to grow.’

3.2.2. Non-precise directional location

A non-precise location lying in a certain direction is encoded by locational demonstratives with the suffix *-kř*. These terms put an emphasis on the spatial vector directed toward the location. The default vector is always directed from the speaker: ‘a source’ of the vector coincides with a speaker’s location, whereas ‘a goal’ is located in the spatial area encoded by the deictic root.

The exceptions are the directional demonstratives derived from the ‘proximal’ deictic root with the dative suffix *-toχ/-roχ/-doχ*. Such forms always indicate ‘a goal’ of the motion directed toward a speaker, as in (10):

- (10) *Tuk-toχ* *p'řə-ja!*
 place.in.direction.toward.proximal.area-DAT come-IMP:2SG
 ‘Come here (to the place in direction toward proximal area)!’

From the following example (11), the addressee can understand that the speaker’s friend lives not far off and identify the direction toward which the speaker is going:

- (11) *Ñi huk-toχ* *p'-ηafq-roχ*
 I place.in.direction.toward.close.area-DAT REFL-friend-DAT
- vi-d-ra.*
 go-IND-FOC
 ‘I am going to the place in that direction (toward close area) to my friend.’

In case the directions of motion referred to by a locational demonstrative and a verb do not coincide, the former takes either the ablative suffix *-ux* or the perlative suffix *-uye*, cf. (4) and (12):

- (12) *Ekr-uye* *ñ-eylŋ-gun* *mu-γĩř*
 place.in.direction.toward.medial.area- 1SG-child-PL boat-INSTR
 PERL

p'řə-ivu-d-γun.

come-PROGR-IND-PL


'My children are coming by boat from the place in that direction (toward medial area).'

4. THE SECONDARY DEICTIC SYSTEM

As it was established in the previous discussion, the root of a locational demonstrative denotes the spatial area within which a location is determined. A spatial area has conventional initial and final borders. For instance, the 'close area' set up by the root *hu-* has an initial border with the 'proximal area' and the final border with the 'medial area', cf. the Figure 1. It appears that it is possible to define a location within each spatial area even more precisely, specifying a relative distance of a particular location to the initial border of the area. The question is about a secondary deictic system which is based on a three-way opposition of 'close', 'medial', and 'distal' locations, cf. the Figure 2.

Figure 2

The structure of locational demonstratives encoding the primary and secondary deictic systems

	(...) ...)	'close location'	'medial location'	'distal location') ...)
		DEICTIC.ROOT- <i>s</i>	DEICTIC.ROOT- <i>z-ŋa</i>	DEICTIC.ROOT- <i>z-ŋa-jo</i>	
		DEICTIC.ROOT- <i>kř</i>	DEICTIC.ROOT- <i>kr-ŋa</i>	DEICTIC.ROOT- <i>kr-ŋa-jo</i>	

The locational demonstratives in *-s* and *-kř* (cf. sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2) without an additional deictic marker(s) usually refer to a location close to the initial border of the area, cf. *ey-s* 'a precise place located in the medial area (relative to the speaker) close to the border with the close area' in the Figure 3 and (13a). This initial border of a particular area is a deictic center for a secondary deictic system.

In case the location is within the same area but farther away from its initial border, the demonstrative attaches the additional suffix *-ŋa*, cf. *ey-z-ŋa* 'a precise place located in the medial area (relative to the speaker) farther away from the border with the close area' in the Figure 3 and (13b).

If the location is even farther away from the area's initial border, one more suffix, i.e. *-jo*, appears on the demonstrative, cf. *ey-z-ŋa-jo* 'a precise place located

- (14) a. *Ñ-ətk* *akř—p‘i-ř*
 1SG-father close.place.in.direction.toward.remote.area—be-CONV:MAN:3SG

hunv-nd.
 be-IND
 ‘My father is in the place in that direction (toward remote area).’
- b. *Akrŋa-ux* *ñin*
 medial.place.in.direction.toward.remote.area-ABL we

tafk *alř—les—p‘e-d-γun*
 long.ago berry—a.lot.of—pick-IND-PL
 ‘Long ago we picked a lot of berries in the place in that direction
 (toward remote area) farther away.’
- c. *Akrŋajo-x* *ñ-ətk*
 distal.place.in.direction.toward.remote.area-ABL 1SG-father

ṭambaŋ—osu-d.
 tent—pitch-IND
 ‘My father pitches a tent in the place in that direction (toward remote
 area) even farther away.’

5. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have discussed the structure and properties of spatial deictic system in Nivkh. It has been shown that as a whole, taking into account both primary and secondary systems, Nivkh exhibits fifteen distance categories and clearly challenges the predominant theoretical view that there are never really more than three [distance categories]’ in language deictic systems (cf. Fillmore 1982: 48–9). Furthermore, since Nivkh deictic system is exclusively speaker-anchored, it presents an interesting counterexample to another general claim that the systems with more than three deictic terms are oriented both at the position of the speaker and at the position of the addressee (cf. Diessel 2005: 6).

Therefore, focusing on a particular issue of deixis, this paper shows possible implications of language data to theory and once again emphasizes the importance of careful language-particular scrutiny and cross-linguistic breadth in attempts to establish language universals that should be rather considered as universal tendencies.

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